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Equipping The Seventh-Day Adventist Pastors In Zimbabwe For Grief Ministry: A Culturally Sensitive Approach

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PASTORS IN ZIMBABWE FOR GRIEF MINISTRY: A CULTURALLY SENSITIVE APPROACH

by

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

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Title: EQUIPPING THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PASTORS IN ZIMBABWE FOR GRIEF MINISTRY: A CULTURALLY SENSITIVE APPROACH

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The Problem

Zimbabwe faces a predicament in which the mortality rate is rising while support for grieving people is declining. At the same time the Zimbabwean culture is rapidly changing because of the impact of Christianity, urbanization, Western influences, and HIV/AIDS. Church leaders are not always in agreement on what rites are appropriate for Christians. These factors often result in inadequate support from the extended family, the community, and the church.

Method

This dissertation discusses the challenges that confront the Seventh-day Adventist church in Zimbabwe in ministering to the bereaved. My purpose was to design a training

program for pastors in Zimbabwe to deal with grieving members in a culturally appropriate manner. Grief is normal, and the Bible recognizes it as a legitimate reaction to bereavement.

In writing this dissertation I consulted literature on grief as well as on the culture of Zimbabwe. I also relied on my knowledge of the culture of Zimbabwe, which I corroborated by interviewing other Zimbabweans. I has designed a pastoral training program for grief ministry in Zimbabwe.

Conclusions

Grief ministry in Zimbabwe is a priority for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. An effective grief ministry will recognize the value of modern research as well as the traditional support systems. It is necessary to study the findings of social sciences and to apply them in ways that are culturally appropriate. It is also necessary to avoid the temptation to condemn cultural rites without studying their significance and possible benefits to the adherents. Because cultural changes cannot be held back, it is necessary to adopt new ways to minister to people when traditional practices are discarded.

Because of the enormity of the task, grief ministry in Zimbabwe will need to be the responsibility of the congregation, rather than the pastor's alone. I, therefore, see the adoption of support groups as a viable approach to grief ministry. This approach is not only efficient to bring comfort to the newly bereaved people, but it also provides an appropriate opportunity for ministry to those who have resolved their grief.

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A Dissertation Chapter

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zimbabwean does not have a grief recovery ministry that is both theologically sound and culturally sensitive. While the local churches have been active at funerals, there has been no organized training to equip pastors and members to minister effectively to the bereaved -- members and non-members.

Although the extended family is a source of support to the grieving, differing belief and value systems have created conflicts. Committed Christians, particularly Adventist, may find themselves ostracized by the rest of the family for abstaining from some rituals. Adventist pastors are often thus plagued by conflicting views over these rituals.

Statement of the Task

The purpose of this dissertation is to lay the groundwork and develop a pilot training program that integrates biblical theology and insights from social sciences and culture, to equip Seventh-day Adventist pastors in Zimbabwe for ministry to the bereaved.

Justification for the Dissertation

Scripture has commanded that believers should "weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). This injunction implies more than just crying with those who grieve; it is a call to ministry. A training program in grief ministry will help the pastors and their congregations to truly "weep with those who weep."

While there is much literature on grief ministry, there is little that deals with the Zimbabwean cultural context, particularly as confronted by the biblical conditionalist teaching regarding death. There is, therefore, a need to train pastors and laity in sound principles to guide them in meeting the emotional needs of the grieving. This dissertation will apply the ideas found in literature from the Western world to the Zimbabwean context.

Non-believing members of the family often have roles to play in funeral arrangements, and this may result in conflicts between theology and culture. Pastors need to be equipped to deal with these conflicts. There is a need to explore ways of ministering meaningfully in this cultural context without compromising the Seventh-day Adventist theological understanding on the state of the dead. A biblically sound funeral and grief ministry is needed.

Members are sometimes confused and the bereaved embittered when the officiating persons are inconsistent in their inclusion and exclusion of cultural rites. There is a need for the church in Zimbabwe to establish an objective standard to test cultural practice.

Since the early 1990s Zimbabwe has been hard-hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with one of the highest infection rates in the world. The frequency of death has curtailed the familial and community support. This has truncated funeral and grieving rites and caused the accumulation of unresolved grief. Therefore the church needs, more and more, to be involved in grief ministry.

Description of the Dissertation

In writing this dissertation current literature on grief was consulted. Because there is a lack of literature on grief, written from a strictly Zimbabwean perspective, I have consulted books from the Western world. I have also interviewed hospital chaplains and other professionals who encounter grieving people. The insights that I got from these sources were useful and applicable to the Zimbabwean context, although at times it is necessary to adapt the ideas.

Another source for this dissertation was literature on the Zimbabwean funerary rites. The descriptions of rites in the available literature are often outdated, or reflect only regional customs. However, the major ceremonies associated with bereavement, namely mourning, burial, divining, inheritance and canonizing the spirit of the deceased, are widespread, although there are variations in how they are performed from place to place. I have drawn from my own experience as a Zimbabwean national. I have also interviewed other Zimbabweans to verify that the aspects of culture I refer to in this dissertation, are accurate representations.

I have used the ideas from these sources to develop a training program for Seventh-day Adventist pastors in Zimbabwe. A major component of the program will be the introduction of support groups.

Definition of Terms

There are some vernacular words that are used often in this dissertation. I use these words because there are no accurate equivalents in the English language. Below are definitions for these terms.

Nyaradzo: A religious (memorial) service held weeks or months after someone has been bereaved. This service takes different formats, ranging from a preaching service to a "christianized" *kurova guva* (canonizing of the spirit).

Kusuma (kusumwa, passive voice): The formal passing on of information to another person. The person may already know the information, but this formality is a demonstration of respect. In many regions of Zimbabwe, *kusuma* is done for important matters such as a marriage, a death, or birth of a child, but in other areas it is done for much less important things. In one of the regions in East Zimbabwe, a hostess will *suma* a visitor that she is going to slaughter a chicken for the meal, a very inconsequential event, yet this is seen as a courtesy.

Sahwira: A ritual (family) friend. This friendship develops between families and is strengthened by mutually helping one another. In some regions the *sahwira* plays key roles at ceremonies such as funerals. Another role of a *sahwira* is to correct any antisocial behavior. It is not acceptable to take offense at the actions of a *sahwira.*

Kurova guva (literally "beating the grave"): A ceremony that usually takes place about a year after bereavement. The purpose of this ceremony is to bring the spirit of the deceased back into the homestead as a guardian for the survivors.

The term "extended family" is used in this dissertation to refer to relatives outside the immediate family. This is an arbitrary delineation because there is no universally recognized method to determine who is a close relative and who is distant. In fact, many people in Zimbabwe tend to avoid describing someone as a distant relative. Some families discourage children from addressing the brothers of a father as "uncle," preferring to call them as "father." The question of who is part of the immediate family and who is the extended family can be hard to determine.

Review of Literature

There is much literature on death, bereavement, and grief resolution. In this section I review a representative sample of literature that was relevant to my study. The samples represent literature written from the Christian as well as the secular perspective.

I have chosen to review the authors that were helpful to me in my study of the various aspects of grief. Some of them, particularly Irion and Jackson, have been cited by other writers because they are among the pioneers of integrating research on grief into pastoral ministry.

Though I make minimal reference to Sigmund Freud, his essay, *Mourning and Melancholia,* published in 1917 is cited by many authors. Because of Freud's prominence as a scholar, it is appropriate to say a word about him. In *Mourning and Melancholia*

Freud depicts grief as the process of withdrawing libido from a cherished object. This is a painful process because, once attached, humans are reluctant to withdraw libido even when a substitute object is readily available. The process is brought to completion when the grieving person comes to terms with the reality of loss and detachment is gradually achieved.

Despite these interesting observations about grief, the focus of Freud's article is not grief or mourning, but rather melancholia. Freud sees many parallels between mourning and melancholia and therefore theorizes that the two states have similar causes and are resolved by similar processes.

Paul E. Irion is one of the pioneers of integrating insights of social sciences to pastoral ministry. He argues for the relevance of the funeral to the needs of the bereaved. He comes to the conclusion that "it would be folly to propose that the contemporary funeral is fully adequate and that the status quo should be preserved. It is equally incorrect to assert that the funeral is totally without value and should be discarded as an empty vestige."[1] His view is that funeral practice should not be static, but should allow for the development of new forms.[2]

Irion suggests that the funeral can be understood from many perspectives. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, the funeral can be understood as an attempt to control the hostile force that death is. It is also seen as a rite of passage from one state of existence to another. From the social psychology perspective, the funeral is a time when

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[1]Paul E. Irion, *The Funeral: Vestige or Value?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 223.

[2]Ibid., 230.

the group comes together to share the loss of one of their own. Community participation in the funeral is viewed as group solidarity and it provides support and strength to the bereaved. The perspective of psychology sees the funeral being an opportunity to confront the reality of death and to express the feelings associated with the loss. The theological perspective sees the funeral as an occasion to worship God and to focus on the hope of the resurrection during the crisis of death.

Irion notes that Christian thought on death and the resurrection reflects Platonic philosophy. To him the biblical picture is that humans are a "psychosomatic unity."[1] Death, as well as the resurrection, affects the whole person. This leads Irion to say, "The Christian funeral, then, can be totally realistic in its presentation of death. There is no need for illusion or concealment. Death can be acknowledged as bringing finality to present relationships as they have been known, while positing the possibility of a new quality of relationship."[2] The funeral is therefore marked by sadness, but it is also an occasion to reflect on the hope of the resurrection.

Irion offers suggestions on how to make the design of the funeral to meet the need for support, meaning, reinforcing reality, the expression of authentic feelings, affirming finality.

One strength in Irion's writings is the fact that he addresses both the theological dimensions of death and bereavement as well as the emotional needs of people. Another strength is the fact that he is informative and evinces study in the related field of

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[1]Ibid., 147.

[2]Ibid., 163.

psychology, yet he is practical, suggesting, for instance, the benefits of maximum attendance and participation in funerals in meeting the bereaved's need for support.[1]

Edgar N. Jackson is another pioneer in writing about ministering to the bereaved. His experience in both pastoral ministry and psychotherapy makes his books both informative and practical. He notes that grief presents itself in many different ways, including anger, sorrow, anxiety, fear, and even humor. He sees grief resolution comprising three important steps: facing the full reality of the loss, breaking some the bonds from the deceased, and finding new relationships and interests.

Jackson suggests that healthy ceremonies and rituals such as funerals are helpful in grief resolution. The value of these rites is in their meaning to the mourners. Jackson warns that rapid changes in cultural practice result in uncertainty, confusion, and even conflict. Because there is much folk wisdom underlying many customs, the rites that seem to be irrational on the surface may be valid and important on the emotional level. Jackson therefore warns that we can cause irreparable damage if we change customs without understanding the underlying meaning.

At times Jackson tends to be technical, reflecting his training and experience as a clinician. However, he also discusses practical matters such as whether or not to put makeup on a dead body or to put on new clothes. These matters he insists must be decided on the basis of how much they benefit the living.

Sullender's book, *Grief and Growth: Pastoral Resources for Emotional and Spiritual Growth*, discusses three approaches to the understanding of grief, namely grief

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[1]Ibid., 172.

as separation anxiety, grief as a function of attachment instincts, and grief as a process of realization, citing Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud, among others. His discussion in the beginning section of his book tends to be technical.

Sullender gives practical suggestions on how a pastor can help the bereaved. He insists that grief ultimately gives opportunities of growth, particularly in the later phases. He suggests that grief and growth are intricately connected like "a continuum where the poles progressively blend into each other."[1]

Sullender notes that one of the main resources for those in crisis is the community of other caring people. This resource, unfortunately, is on the decline. Sullender, therefore, suggests that it is the pastors' responsibility to help congregations to become supportive communities, through small group ministry. The groups should be modeled after Alcoholic Anonymous, in which those who have been there help others. He suggests that one or two lay caring teams, caring for the bereaved, would be a great resource for the pastor.

Sullender sees value in grief rituals. To him rituals should strike the right balance between sets of polarities that he suggests: control and release, observation and participation, novelty and continuity, and the universal and the personal.

Finally Sullender observes the role of belief in the grieving process. Crises initiate temporary loss of meaning and in these times one usually reevaluates one's belief system and tries to find the purpose of one's suffering.

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[1]R. Scott Sullender, *Grief and Growth: Pastoral Resources for Emotional and Spiritual Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 80.

Sullender's book discusses grief from many angles. To me its greatest relevance is that it is geared for pastors and frequently gives the reader the implications of the approaches it discusses. Another strength is that Sullender sees grief as an opportunity for growth. This is a useful observation to the pastor who wishes to lead a mourner to eventually help others cope with loss.

Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson coauthored *All Our Losses, All Our Griefs: Resources for Pastoral Care.* In it they observe that grief is universal. To them grief results from separation from an object that one has attached himself or herself to. They note that there are many kinds of losses, including material, roles, relationships, bodily functions, etc. There are also some variables in loss, such as permanent versus temporary loss, avoidable versus unavoidable loss, anticipated versus unanticipated loss, and actual versus imagined loss.

Instead of phases of grief, they choose to speak of common elements of grief. This removes the notion that the feelings experienced are in sequence. One aspect of grief they address, that others writers often ignore, is the physical manifestation or somatization, which may include tightness in the throat, insomnia, loss of appetite, weight loss, etc.[1] Mitchell and Anderson characterize grief as coming in an unpredictable manner, distorting perceptions of time, the self, and even God.

Mitchell and Anderson note that even though grief is by nature a lonely task, the presence of others is required for successful resolution. They classify grief ministry into

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[1]Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Griefs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 81.

four modes: intervention, support, encouraging memory, and assisting the bereaved to reintegrate into the community.

Finally they discuss the public ministry, involving the funeral and other rituals. They note that rituals should be consistent with Christian values, citing specifically the impropriety of lavish spending. They note that the funeral is primarily a supportive ministry and it should therefore focus on the needs of the immediate family.

Mitchell and Anderson write primarily for those who give pastoral care. Their book is informative and practical. I noted with much appreciation that their view on grief expression was balanced, neither inhibiting it nor encouraging unrestrained expression.

Larry Yeagley is an Adventist pastor who began a support program called Grief Recovery in 1975. He has conducted this program in many countries. The purpose of Yeagley's program is to support the grieving rather than to proselytize. Yeagley notes that this purpose makes the program spiritual, despite the fact that there is no prayer or Bible reading during group sessions. However, his book, *Grief Recovery,* a companion to the program, makes many references to God, prayer, and belief. It discusses helpful ways for individuals and families to deal with grief. Instead of theories, Yeagley shares experiences of people whom he has encountered in grief ministry.

Yeagley indicates that some have condemned his program for not including prayer and citing Scripture during the support group session. However, we should note that the success that this program has enjoyed for decades demonstrates that the program meets a need, particularly in secular societies. Meeting the needs of this sector, particularly when others seem to be oblivious to them, is commendable. We should also note that Yeagley

recommends that pastors who wish to use this program are free to adapt it to suit the needs of those they are serving.

In his book, Geoff Walters attempts to answer the question that he raises in the title, *Why Do Christians Find it Hard to Grieve?* He discusses grief in both testaments of the Bible. Walters contrasts the teachings of the Greek philosophers on immortality with the Bible and is persuaded that platonic thought has colored Christian teaching, particularly through the influence of Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo.

The reasons that Walters cites for the Christians' plight with grief seem to arise from a faulty understanding of Scripture. To Walters, the teaching of the immortality of the soul as found in Greek philosophy, and in many Christian circles, is a denial of the reality of death, and it therefore challenges, explicitly or implicitly, the validity of grief. Thus Christians, when they are faced with grief situations, find their theology standing in the way of the grief process.

Walters insists that in biblical accounts of grief there is no mention of the Bible characters attempting to find comfort in religious belief. Thus he writes about David mourning for Saul and Jonathan: "Nevertheless, God is not mentioned in this *qinah* or the narrative in which it is set. The striking implication of this is that David, God's chosen one, like Abraham and Jacob whom we have already observed, faces grief in its full pain without any attempt at mitigation by finding support in the love of God!"[1] Naturally one would ask, "What good is faith if it is irrelevant in crisis?" In my view Walters tends to

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[1]Geoff Walters, *Why Do Christians Find It Hard to Grieve?* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997), 20.

overstate his case, but he balances it off in the latter section of his book by offering the resurrection as a source of hope, and he points out that believers who encounter grief "do not need to hide from their Christian hope or keep the two experiences in . . . different compartments of their lives."

Carol Staudacher's book, *Beyond Grief: A Guide for Recovering from the Death of a Loved One,* is a guide for bereaved individuals. It describes the grief experience, citing some reactions, such as disbelief and numbness, anger, guilt, fear and anxiety, sadness, despair, confusion, and disorientation. Staudacher gives the bereaved person perspective, by showing the normalcy of these reactions and telling of the experiences of other bereaved people who displayed those reactions. She cites, for example, a young woman whose leg was amputated following an accident that also killed her fiancé. The young woman recounts: "When I got out of the hospital and saw a van that looked like Phil's van, I would turn around and follow it. It was like the phantom pain of my limb loss. The limb was still there even though it wasn't. It was the same with Phil. He was with me even though I knew, intellectually, that he wasn't."[1] Staudacher also offers some suggestions on how to cope with these reactions, again, citing examples of bereaved people.

The second section of Staudacher's book discusses specific kinds of bereavement, namely the death of a spouse, a parent, and a child, and the specific reactions that tend to result from such loss. She cites, for instance, the likelihood of marital problems which

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[1]Carol Staudacher, *Beyond Grief: A Guide for Recovery from the Death of a Loved One* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 1987), 8.

may lead to divorce following the death of a child.[1] She also discusses specific situations, such as bereavement in childhood, and bereavement by accidental death, suicide, and murder.

In the final section of her book, Staudacher focuses on getting and giving help. She gives practical guidelines on how the bereaved may start a support group with others facing similar situations. She also gives practical help to those who are trying to help the bereaved.

Staudacher's book is easy to read and to understand. The anecdotes that she cites help to illustrate what she is discussing. Though Staudacher does not cite Scripture or make references to religion, her book is a practical guide to grief ministry.

Judy Tatelbaum's *Courage to Grieve: Creative Living, Recovery, and Growth Through Grief* discusses grief management from the Gestalt point of view, holding that "we can finish or complete any experience in life, that what is past can truly be relinquished."[2] She notes that successful grief resolution is dependant on past ability to deal with crisis, emotional maturity, having a life purpose, a support system, and courage. She describes the mourning period as three phases, shock, suffering and disorganization, and aftershocks and reorganization.

In line with the Gestalt philosophy, Tatelbaum guides the bereaved to "finish" the grief process. To do this she recommends revisiting the grief situation and if necessary to

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[1]Ibid., 112, 113.

[2]Judy Tatelbaum, *The Courage to Grieve: Creative Living, Recovery, and Growth Through Grief* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 107.

engage in a "dialogue" with the deceased. She suggests that one can know that one has "finished" when one's grief feelings have dissipated and when the deceased can come to mind without pain.[1]

Tatelbaum suggests that loss can be a turning point in life, possibly leading to transformation. The outcome depends to a large degree on the grieving person's resolutions which often become self-fulfilling prophecies. "It is critically important, therefore," she writes, "that we examine and acknowledge our thoughts so that we may create positive rather than negative realities for ourselves."[2]

One strength of Tatelbaum's book is that it includes a chapter on children's grief. Another strength is that she highlights the bereaved's role in reaching grief resolution, while also stressing the importance of a support system that includes others. Yet another strength is the view that loss is a turning point leading to transformation.

One weakness in this book is that the method of "finishing" is not appropriate to our conditionalist theology, and is especially problematic in the Zimbabwean context where traditional religion includes addressing the spirit of the dead. Another weakness is the fact that Tatelbaum seems to tone down the grimness of death. For instance, she suggests that death is a natural part of living, and that we do well to view it as an invisible, but friendly companion in life's journey.[3] The Adventist perspective rejects this, seeing death instead as antithetical to life and being the enemy that Scripture says it is.

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[1]Ibid., 127.

[2]Ibid., 129.

[3]Ibid., 12.

J. Kumbirai discusses *"kurova guva"* (canonizing the spirit of the ancestor), a ceremony that takes place about a year after burial. This is a ceremony in which the spirit of the deceased is enabled to rise from the grave "as a re-vivified being and to return peacefully to protect its living descendants."[1] Without this ceremony the spirit can only manifest itself by inflicting harm. This belief, and the fear it provokes, places tremendous pressure on Christians to fulfill this cultural obligation, either because of their own fears or because they are coerced by fearful relatives.

Kumbirai notes that the Roman Catholic Church, of which he is a priest, has instituted some practices, viewed as a compromise between the cultural practice and Christian teaching. In these practices the rites involve drinking traditional beer brewed from grain that a church minister blesses first. Kumbirai's model of *nyaradzo* (a memorial service conducted weeks or months after bereavement) is an example of these rites.

Kumbirai gathered his information from interviewing informants whose explanations for the different rituals were not always identical. This phenomenon highlights the complexity of attempting to appraise cultural rites in Zimbabwe. Kumbirai's work shows a wide understanding of the Shona culture. His analysis of the relationship between the living and the dead in African thought is especially perceptive. He sees *kurova guva as* dramatizing the belief that the living and the dead form one integral whole. Evidently Kumbirai does not see the need for the Christian religion to

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[1]J. Kumbirai, "*Kurova Guva* and Christianity," in *Christianity South of the Zambezi,* ed. M. F. C. Bourdillon (Gwelo, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1977), 123.

confront and even contradict culture. He concludes, "Christianity should permeate the African way of life (his religion is a part of it), it should complete, purge and perfect it, and not destroy it. In the case of the '*kurova guva*' ceremony, this means accepting the traditional way of honouring the dead with what additions or improvements the Christian Gospel has to offer."[1]

Expectations from This Dissertation

My hope is that this dissertation will give the Zimbabwean pastors skills to do more effective grief ministry in their culture. With better skills, the pastors will minister to their grieving members with confidence. They will also recognize the value of their members' participation in ministering to others. In addition to effective ministry following bereavement, the churches will also offer the bereaved an opportunity to participate in grief support groups. This will cause Adventist congregations to become healing communities not only to their members but to many more people in their community. My hope is that this program will not only help the Zimbabwean church, but will become a model to other parts of Africa.

In addition to this improvement in pastoral ministry during bereavement, I also hope that this dissertation will motivate the pastors to reevaluate African culture and to affirm those aspects that do not contradict Scripture. Tolerance in this regard will reduce needless friction with members.

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[1]Ibid., 129.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

For many Christians the time of bereavement is often complicated by conflicting expectations. On the one hand grief naturally follows the loss of a loved one, but on the other there is a fear of betraying one's belief in the hereafter. Whether the afterlife is understood as the resurrection or as continued existence of the soul after the demise of the body, the inconsistency of grief and faith remains for many believers. C. S. Lovett, in his *Death: Graduation to Glory,* exhorts, "Therefore we must not behave as those who feel the end of man is dust. Christians can meet death with a shout. **A shout that shocks.** And the world is shocked when it sees God's people marching through death's door beaming like children" (emphasis in original).[1]

Anthony Wilhelm, in *Christ Among Us,* writes, "Death is the climactic experience of our life. It is more than just a moment of time; it is an experience. We awaken to full consciousness and full freedom, an encounter with God himself. All our life has been

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[1]C. S. Lovett, *Death: Graduation to Glory* (Baldwin Park, CA: Personal Christianity, 1974), 2. Consistent with the title of this book, Lovett repeatedly speaks of death as a positive occurrence. Much of the language that he uses reflects platonic thought patterns.

lived for just this."[1] Such a conviction implies that grief is irrelevant and even inappropriate when a believer dies. Well-meaning friends and ministers therefore counsel mourners to curtail their expressions of grief because of the hope of life after death. The comforters back their words by making reference to passages of Scripture to give authority to their advice.

Scripture and Grief

One text that is cited frequently to suggest that grieving is inappropriate is, "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thess 4:13).[2] Some have interpreted this verse to mean that those who have hope are distinguished from the hopeless by the ability to resist grief in bereavement. They view displays of grief as a rejection of faith.

It is important to note that in this passage the issue under discussion is not whether or not believers should grieve in bereavement. If this were the case the passage would have discussed this issue further. Those who cite this text as evidence that grief is inappropriate for believers are thus depending on a supposed implication to make their point. The main concern to the author of this passage is to encourage believers to cling to the hope of eternal life that comes from the resurrection of Jesus. We should take note that Paul had been forced to leave Thessalonica abruptly (Acts 17:5-10), possibly before

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[1]Anthony Wilhelm, *Christ Among Us* (New York: Newman, 1967), 379.

[2]Quotations from the Bible are from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise stated.

he had adequately taught the new converts. After his departure, the Thessalonian believers were confronted by the death of some in their ranks. Because of gaps in their understanding of the eschatological time-line, they feared that those who died before the parousia would forfeit their place in the kingdom.[1] It would be easy to see that this theological gap would complicate their grief in the event of the death of a loved one. For one who had these fears, grief over a deceased loved one would have an additional dimension of despair. Grieving under these circumstances would be no different for believers and non-believers because in both there would be the mood of hopelessness. It is not beyond reason to imagine that with each bereavement the Thessalonian believers were concerned about their individual fate should the Lord continue to tarry.

An interpretation of 1 Thess 4:13 that assumes that Paul is arguing against the expressions of grief is deficient in that it totally ignores this background. It also ignores the general tenor of the argument that Paul is presenting. Such an interpretation also ignores the evidence that we find in other Pauline passages and the wider biblical context.

That this passage assumes a difference between believers and non-believers is incontestable. Believers and non-believers are different in the way they grieve but both groups do endure sorrow. Paul's use of the word *kathos* ("as," "just as," "in the degree that" [2]) suggests that he is concerned about the manner and proportion of grieving that believers display. The believer's grief should not be identical to that of the non-believers.

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[1]F. F. Bruce, "1 & 2 Thessalonians," *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 45 (Waco: Word Books, 1982), xxxviii.

[2]Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American, 1886), s.v. "Kathos."

The hope of the resurrection should modify and even ameliorate, though not eliminate, grief. The blessed hope is thus a resource that believers can employ in times of bereavement.

It is important that 1 Thess 4:13, though a significant passage for Adventists, be not interpreted in isolation. There is abundant evidence that suggests that expressions of grief have their place even among believers. The Apocalypse presents the new heaven and the new earth in which "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). The end of mourning comes in the new age when death itself will have been annihilated. Indeed, mourning and sorrow will be eradicated but not because they are sinful practices, but because they are unpalatable results of the miseries of this age.

In 1 Thess 4:13, Paul was not prohibiting mourning. He implies, in Phil 2:27, that he himself would have grieved had Epaphroditus died. In 1 Thess 4:13 and Phil 2:27, Paul uses the words, *lupeo* ("grieve") and *lupe* ("grief" or "sorrow") respectively. The two words derive from the same root and both are used in the texts as responses to bereavement. Vincent suggests that Paul is saying that he would have experienced "wave after wave" of sorrow.[1] Paul would not have condoned in himself what he had prohibited in his convert.

Commenting on Phil 2:27, John Calvin says,

Paul acknowledges that the death of Epaphroditus would have been

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[1]Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 441.

> bitterly painful to him and he recognizes it as an instance of God's sparing mercy towards himself, that he had been restored to health. He does not, therefore, make it his boast that he has the apathy . . . of the stoics, as if he were a man of iron, and exempt from human affections. . . . He acknowledges that he would have felt the death of Epaphroditus an event hard to be endured, but he would at length have brought his temper of mind into accordance with the will of God.[1]

The broader biblical context should not be ignored. Scripture gives us glimpses of godly people grieving at the loss of loved ones. Geoff Walters discusses grief in the lives of some godly people in the Bible.[2] He relates the accounts of Abraham, Jacob, and David. While Walters gives some interesting observations on how the accounts of grief are consistent with the findings of modern psychology, I question the validity of making such precise judgments when it is clear that a lot is left unsaid in Bible accounts. For instance, Walters attributes David's command to kill the Amelekite who announced Saul's death to the anger stage of grieving. Thus he writes, "David was simply in a position of power which enabled him to express that anger in a particularly violent way."[3] Interpreting these biblical accounts as primarily psychological manifestations of grief might lead us to read more into the text than was intended. It seems to me that biblical accounts should not be taken as case studies in psychology. Just as scientific insights should not be used to authenticate Scripture, so we should not seek to press Scripture into a scientific mold. Reading psychological opinions into biblical narratives may have its

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[1]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 82, 83.

[2]Walters, 9-38.

[3]Ibid., 19.

place, but it should be done tentatively.

In His ministry, Jesus came in contact with the bereaved and turned their grief into joy by raising the deceased. In the account of the resurrection of Lazarus, the most detailed of these narratives, John makes a moving portrayal of Jesus grieving alongside the bereaved family. John 11:33 shows us Jesus groaning and troubled, having seen Mary and the Jews weeping. Two more times in this chapter (vss 35 and 38) John records Jesus' deep emotions. While it is true that Jesus grieved at the hypocrisy and unbelief of the Jews, it is also true He wept in empathy with the mourners.[1] It is striking that Jesus, "the Resurrection and the Life," mourned with family even though he would raise Lazarus shortly afterward. Even the momentary sorrow that the family endured moved Jesus to tears. By weeping with the mourners, Jesus affirmed the need to grieve. He also demonstrated that the hope of the resurrection, imminent or distant, does not nullify the need to grieve.

In a sense, the death of John the Baptist (Matt 14:1-13) stands in marked contrast to the raising of Lazarus. In the former case Jesus chose not to raise the deceased. Instead, Jesus retreated to a solitary place to find space to grieve. We may not fully understand why Jesus did not prevent John's death or why He did not raise him from the grave. We should not lose sight of the fact that in this time of bereavement, Jesus and His associates sought an environment that was conducive to grieving. Can it be that Jesus did not spare Himself grief to illustrate to believers that mourning a deceased loved one is consistent

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[1]Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1940), 533.

with faith?

The accounts that have been cited above are only a few examples among many that show devout people grieving the death of a loved one. Scripture goes a step further when it suggests in several passages that the absence of mourning following a death is a major indignity. The prophet Ahijah condemns king Jeroboam and his household to suffer deaths in which there would be no burial (1 Kgs 14:1-13). Abijah, Jeroboam's son, was the only one who would be mourned "because in him there is found something pleasing to the Lord" (1 Kgs 14:13). Because of their wickedness, the people of Jeremiah's day risked unlamented deaths (Jer 16:1-6). To save Jeremiah and his progeny from such a detestable fate, God warned him not to raise a family.

Nigel J. Robb observes that in Bible times both men and women were expected to cry and to physically express their grief, hence the rise of rituals such as wearing sackcloth and covering the head with ashes. He asserts, "Mourning in the biblical tradition is very clearly something to be acknowledged and valued as religiously appropriate and psychologically effective."[1]

1 Thess 4:13-18 offers believers the reason to grieve in a different way from non-believers. The text does not prohibit grieving. Viewed in the broader biblical context it recognizes the need for believers to mourn their deceased and offers them the ultimate comfort, the blessed hope that emanates from the reality of the risen Christ.

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[1]Nigel Robb, *A Time to Die and a Time to Live* (St. Andrews: Blake Publications, 1996), 9.

Death: An Enemy

In the biblical tradition, death is a detestable event. According to God's original plan, death should never have been part of the human experience. God warned Adam and Eve that death would come as a result of disobedience. Thus death was as foreign to God's plan as sin was. The two entered the arena together (Gen 2:17) and they will be exterminated together (Rev 21:4, 8, 27).

Robert L. Gram, citing Eccl 3:11, suggests that the human hunger for eternal life is part of the Divine image. He sees death as "an unnatural roadblock to our divine programming."[1] Thus from the beginning, death was an unwelcome intruder into the Divine order. [2]

Gen 3, the primary reference to death and grief, shows that sin is the cause for death and grief. Gram suggests that death was meant to reiterate human finitude, to repudiate Adam's aspirations to be like God.[3] Death is therefore the opposite of immortality, not the gateway that ushers it in. It is a cause of grief to both God and humankind. Within the same pericope, however, God revealed His purpose to conquer death. The Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).

The hope that death would be ultimately vanquished remained alive in the pages of the Bible. The emphasis of the different authors varied depending on their purpose in writing. Even in the Old Testament we find references to the resurrection at the end of

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[1]Robert L. Gram, *An Enemy Disguised* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 93.

[2]Ibid., 94.

[3]Ibid.

time. Dan 12:2 states, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Isaiah also speaks of death being swallowed up forever, and of the dead living and their bodies rising (Isa 25:8; 26:19).

The Old Testament also gives instances in which God exhibited victory over death. Enoch and Elijah were translated (Gen 5:24 and 2 Kgs 2:11,12). By the illumination of the New Testament, it is evident that Moses was resurrected and taken to Heaven (Matt 17:3; Jude 9). There are, however, other cases in the Old Testament of people who were raised from the dead to enjoy a continuance of earthly life for a time. Regardless of the circumstances and destiny of those who had victory over death, the occurrence was brought about by Divine intervention. God is the life-giver and Satan is the author of death. Life is therefore to be always celebrated as a blessing from God, while death should always be understood as a cause of grief.

We also find entreaties to God's children to choose life rather than death (Deut 30:15, 19). The psalmist acknowledges that the wise and the foolish must alike die (Ps 49:10). He notes that for the foolish "death is their shepherd. . . . Sheol[1] shall be their home" (vs. 14). However, the psalmist expresses confidence that "God will ransom my

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[1]*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes that *sheol* in the Old Testament, translated *hades* in the LXX, denotes the grave, the state or abode of the dead. The dictionary sees an inconsistency among some Bible translators when they translate *sheol* as grave in historical accounts and leave it untranslated in poetry. James Orr, "Sheol," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, (1939), 4:2761, and Eriks Galenieks, "The Nature, Function and Purpose of the Term 'Sheol' in the Torah, Prophets, and the Writings" (Ph.D. dissertation, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2005).

soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me" (vs 15). Thus, the psalmist seems to imply a difference in the destiny of the foolish and the wise, though both groups experience death.

The Apocryphal literature, written during the intertestamental period, is by no means homogeneous in its teaching about death and the afterlife. What is clear, however, is its recognition that death is not a part of God's plan and that He has a plan to terminate it. The Apocryphal writings mention the resurrection for the righteous several times (2 Macc 7:14; 12:43; 4 Esdr 2:23; 14:35). Although each person has the accountability to choose between life and death (Sir 15:17), God is portrayed as having power over life and death, leading mortals to Hades and back again (Wis 16:13). Thus while humans have relative power over their destiny, it is only by God's power that they can come back from the grave. Their destiny is therefore controlled by God. In Sir 11:14, good and bad as well as life and death come from God. The author of the Wisdom of Solomon asserts that God did not create death. Rather, death came through the devil's envy and those who keep company with him experience it (Wis 1:12,13; 2:24). In Wis 2 he taunts the wicked for believing that death is the end. He concludes that "God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity" (Wis 2:23).

In fact, the belief in resurrection was so real that 2 Macc 7 gives the account of seven brothers who, with their mother, willingly endured martyrdom rather than eat the flesh of swine. The mother and her sons repeated the theme of resurrection as they answered their torturers and as they encouraged one another.

The New Testament discusses the final resurrection in several places. The

synoptic gospels present Jesus upholding the resurrection when He was challenged by the Sadducees (Matt 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38). He indicated that there is a resurrection of the just and of the wicked and at which time the rewards will be apportioned (Luke 14:14; John 5:28,29). When Martha, in her grief over Lazarus's death, expressed her belief in the resurrection, Jesus made His great pronouncement, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25, 26).

Thus, Jesus did not only believe in the eschatological resurrection; He viewed Himself as both the basis and the agent of this event. Belief in Him and the hearing of His voice are prerequisite to the resurrection. What is of interest here is the fact that by calling Himself the Resurrection, Jesus is making Himself to be the very antithesis of death. There seems to be no way that death could play a part in bringing to fruition the bliss of paradise.

That Jesus considered death to be an enemy is also evident from the accounts of His death. In His predictions of His impeding death to the Twelve, He did not paint a glorious picture of the experience. Associated with the imminent death was suffering and rejection (Matt 16:21; Luke 9:22). The foretelling of the event was enough to distress the disciples (Matt 17:23). Jesus Himself, though absolutely willing to die, did not approach death with relish, as Socrates had done centuries earlier. His prayer for the "cup" to pass and His cry, ""My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" give evidence that death

was unwelcome. Thus, His death seemed to Him to be akin to abandonment by God.[1]

Paul echoes the same position when he incessantly links the eschatological resurrection of the saints to the person and the resurrection of Christ. Thus he declares, "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:21, 22). Union with Christ in His death is assurance of participation in His resurrection (Rom 6:5). Thus in 1 Cor 15 Paul can argue that denial of the eschatological resurrection is a denial of the resurrection of Christ. In Col 1:15, 18 Paul calls Him the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from the dead. Christ is the firstborn of all creation because in Him everything was created and holds together. Thus, in Him all the saints will be resurrected and in Him post-resurrection life holds together.

The Bible also gives us another aspect of death. While it was not in God's original plan, there are times when it brings relief to pain. Job longed and prayed for death because it would relieve him from his pain (Job 14:13). In the context of sin and the ensuing suffering, death can be a blessing, particularly for God's children since it brings rest from their labors (Rev 14:13). Ps 116:15 tells us that the death of the righteous is precious in God's sight. Their death seals their destiny in God's kingdom. To them, death is a period of rest in which they await the second coming of Jesus (1 Thess 4:13-17). It is

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[1]I must note here that Christ's death was indeed the second death, unlike the "sleep" death that is subject to resurrection to life or to destruction. Since His death was a just penalty for our sin, and accepted as a substitute for our punishment (2 Cor 5:21), it had to be the second death that he suffered in our place. However, "sleep" death is a type of the eternal death that is to come to those who do not accept salvation through Jesus Christ.

clear, however, that even with these positive aspects, death was not a part of God's original plan nor will it be allowed to exist permanently.

The Apocalypse clearly teaches that death will be annihilated. Death, together with Hades, gives up their dead, just before they are cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:13, 14). From that point on, death will be no longer (Rev 21:4). There will be no more mourning because death will be forever vanquished and a new order of existence ushered in.

It is incontrovertible, even from a cursory reading of Scripture, that death's existence in the world is temporary. This is because death is an intruder introduced by the devil into God's perfect universe. The plan of redemption is God's way of ridding the world of this intruder. Thus, death, grief, and bereavement are best understood within the framework of the Great Controversy motif. God Himself becomes the ultimate warrior against death. Death, a part of the enemy's arsenal, will be destroyed with him at the end of time. Like Satan, death is a defeated enemy.

Immortality: Inherent or Conditional

Within the Christian Church there are two divergent views about the nature of human beings. The first view, Immortal-Soulism, suggests that humans were created immortal and that, despite the Fall, the soul does not die. According to this view, "man was created with a soul, which has a separate existence from the body, and that it is innately and indivisibly immortal."[1] Two corollaries of this idea immediately present

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[1]Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1966), 1:19.

themselves. One is the belief that soon after death the soul departs to heaven, hell, or purgatory. The other corollary is the belief in the eternal torment in hell.

The second view, Conditionalism, holds that immortality was offered to humanity on God's terms and conditions. The implication of this view is that at death the individual becomes unconscious and ceases to participate in any events, while waiting for the resurrection to receive his or her just reward (Eccl 9:5; Ps 146:4; John 5:28, 29). Further, the reward of the wicked is final destruction, which entails total annihilation (1 Thess 1:9). In this view there can be neither purgatory nor eternal torment because the soul does not have a separate, immortal existence apart from the body.[1]

The view that one espouses has implications on the grief process and how to assuage the pain of the bereaved. In deciding which view to accept, it is tempting to prefer a theory that seems to offer the most comfort to the grieving. A judgment based on this consideration alone may prove erroneous and inadequate. In teaching and in ministry it is the truth of the Bible, rather than the most palatable theories, that should have the upper hand. Upholding the Scripture will also prove to be the wiser and more effective alternative. Thus, our focus should be to inquire into the teaching of Scripture and to follow it to its logical conclusion. Questions about what brings the most comfort should only be secondary to the task of discovering the teaching of Scripture.

Origin and Development of Immortal-Soulism

Despite the belief of many Christians, the Bible does not teach that people have

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[1]Ibid., 19, 20.

immortal souls that are distinct from the body. Indeed, there may be passages in Scripture which have been interpreted that way. A careful study of these passages will show that such interpretations read into Scripture prevalent beliefs that have their roots in Greek philosophy. This dissertation will not do a passage-by-passage analysis and refutation of texts that are often cited to support Immortal-Soulism. It will also not dwell too long on articulating Conditionalism.[1] However, it is necessary to lay a foundation for the discussion on bereavement grief ministry since the grieving process is influenced by underlying beliefs concerning the afterlife.

Greek Philosophers

Platonic philosophy is marked by its insistence on dualism, a theory that holds that reality is composed of two mutually irreducible entities. For Plato, physical objects were the impermanent expressions of unchanging ideas. In keeping with this belief, Plato viewed humans as having an immortal soul, which is released from the prison house of the body. Froom observes that the concept of the separate existence of the soul actually predates Plato, appearing vaguely in the time of Homer, in the ninth century B.C.[2] By the fifth century, Heraclitus would say that the human soul emanated from the imperishable universal fire or soul, thus making it akin to the gods.[3] Pythagoras, his contemporary,

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[1]There are already many works that accomplish that task, among which are books by Le Roy Edwin Froom and Samuelle Bacchiocchi cited in this dissertation.

[2]Froom, 531.

[3]Ibid., 541.

while espousing a similar philosophy, taught that the soul predated the body and transmigrated through successive bodies until it returned to God, its original source.[1]

Plato, Socrates' student, was much influenced by these theories and in his own teachings he stressed the inherent immortality of the soul. In his *Phaedo,* Plato writes an account of Socrates' last hours as told by Phaedo to some friends. In the conversation, Socrates leads his listeners to the conclusion that learning is a matter of recollection by the senses, of things that the soul knew in the previous existence.[2] At death the soul, if it was not contaminated by the body, "departs to that place which is, like itself, invisible, divine, immortal, and wise, where, on its arrival, happiness awaits it . . . [and] it really spends the rest of time with God."[3] However, if the soul is tainted because of the passions of the body, it is "weighed down and dragged back into the visible world, through fear, as they say of Hades or the invisible, and hovers about the tombs and graveyards."[4] Socrates was so convinced of the immortality of the soul that he willingly drank the poison that was prepared for him and, as he was dying, instructed Crito to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing. Concerning this instruction to Crito, Edith Hamilton comments that "to himself Socrates was recovering, not dying. He was entering not into death, but into life, 'life more abundantly.'"[5]

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[1]Ibid., 545.

[2]Plato, *Phaedo* 75 e.

[3]Ibid., 81 a.

[4]Ibid., 81 c.

[5]Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *Plato: Collected Dialogues,* Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 40.

Jewish Philosophers

Jews who studied Greek philosophy became an important bridge that conveyed dualistic notions to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. By employing an allegorical interpretation of Scripture, they mimicked how some Greek philosophers had explained some sections in Homer's writings that they found objectionable.[1] These Jewish philosophers were motivated by at least two motives, the desire to reconcile the Greek philosophies they had now espoused to their religion and the Sacred Writings and also the desire to portray to their Greek counterparts the sense that the Scriptures were not morally and intellectually deficient.[2]

Aristobulus (c. 170-150 B.C.) is the earliest Jewish writer on record to employ an allegorical interpretation of Scripture. He claimed the Pentateuch, rather than being outside the sphere of philosophy, was the source from which Greek philosophers had acquired their philosophy.[3]

The champion of the allegorical method is Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.-A.D.), who insisted on a spiritual and metaphysical meaning of Scripture beyond the literal words.[4] Thus, he sees dualism, not only in the teachings of Scripture, but in the very nature of the Sacred Writings. Philo's view of the human nature was thus influenced by

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[1]Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), 58-61, 66.

[2]Ibid., 66.

[3]Ibid., 67.

[4]Ibid.

his dualistic belief. In commenting on Jacob using a stone for a pillow, he says that the stone is one of the immortal souls that inhabit the divine place (God's abode), being incorporeal intelligences. The use of the stone as a pillow, to Philo, signifies putting this immortal soul close to the mind, and under the pretext of going to sleep, taking repose in the intelligence he had chosen.[1] How he arrives at this conclusion is not clear but his assertion shows that he espoused Platonic views. Once Platonic thoughts had made inroads into Judaism, it would be but a small step to touch Christianity.

Karl Kautsky cites Philo's closing sentence in the first volume of *Allegorical Interpretations* which reads: "True, Heraclitus has said, 'We live their [the gods'] death, and die their life'; when we are alive, the soul is dead and buried in the body as in a funeral mound, while the soul lives its own life when we are dead, and is freed from the evil and the corpse of the life tied to the body."[2] Kautsky correctly notices that this belief is echoed in Christian thought. What he fails to see is the fact that these ideas, as articulated by Christian theologians, do not comprise the pristine Christian teaching but represent subsequent influences.

Church Fathers

As Christianity moved westward from Palestine it encountered more and more converts whose thinking had been influenced by Greek Philosophy. A natural outcome of

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[1]Philo *On Dreams* 1. 21.

[2]Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity,* trans. by Henry F. Mins (New York: S.A. Russell, 1953), 92, 93.

this development was the desire on the part of the Church to present its tenets in forms and expressions that made sense to the Greek mind. In the third century Platonism began to experience a revival. Plotinus (A.D. 205-270) and Porphyry (A.D. 250-c.303) were some of the notable neo-Platonists who repeated Plato's views about the immortality of the soul.[1] Gnosticism, though rejected by orthodox Christians, had been advancing its teachings. The teaching that the soul was a divine spark was central to the many Gnostic sects. Through a series of initiations into secret knowledge, *gnosis*, the soul, would be liberated from evil matter.[2]

These teachings were resisted by very early Church Fathers, among them Tatian and Irenaeus. The current towards hellenization, aided by the Alexandrian school, eventually won the day. Increasingly, Hellenistic meanings were read into Scripture and introduced into Christian tenets. Walters observes:

> Death itself thus also began to change its meaning. It became less and less what Paul had called 'the last enemy' and more and more a longed for liberation into an immaterial state of blessedness. Grief, which had co-existed with the Biblical doctrine of death and resurrection, was becoming less and less consistent with perceived Christian teaching.[3]

Walters comments perceptively that, in this case, the desire to use the opponents' ideas led to a subtle defeat even while a larger battle was being won.[4] In the attempt to challenge Greek philosophies, Hellenistic thought patterns and ideas were adopted and

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[1]Walters, 56-57.

[2]Ibid., 57.

[3]Ibid., 58.

[4]Ibid., 57.

passed onto posterity. The result is that the Christian church has beliefs that do not emanate from Scripture but instead are natural outgrowths of Greek philosophy.

One of the most influential Church Fathers was St. Augustine, whose writings have helped to shape Christian theology. A stepping stone to his conversion to Christianity was his encounter with Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, who had obvious Platonic leanings. This encounter proved powerful for Augustine. Ambrose's influence, accompanied by Platonic readings, was intellectually attractive to Augustine and led to his conversion to Christianity.[1] By his own admission, he continued to hold Platonic literature in high esteem.[2] It is not surprising that Augustine's theology is marked by Platonic tendencies. His dualistic view of the nature of human beings is a product of the Greek philosophies that he espoused. Augustine understood his "beatific vision"[3] as an out-of-the-body experience and thus in his understanding heaven was an immaterial reality.[4]

Through his impact on Anselm, Aquinas, Petrarch, Luther, Bellarmine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard, Augustine has left his footprints in mediaeval scholasticism, Western

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[1]Ibid., 60. At this point in time Augustine found Christianity as taught by Ambrose intellectually attractive and the Platonic reading became a stepping stone to his conversion.

[2]Augustine *Confessions* 6.13, 26.

[3]Ibid., 197. The "beatific vision" was an out-of the-body experience that Augustine claims that he and Monica, his mother, had in the town of Ostia. He claims that during a conversation about eternal life, their longing and straining for eternal life ended in a fleeting instant in which they seemed to reach out and touch eternity and its bliss.

[4]Walters, 62, 63.

mysticism, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the Enlightenment, and modern philosophy. Thus, Augustine's influence has continued to color both Protestant and Catholic theology.[1] Since the Christian church held Augustine in high esteem, it has continued the undertaking to marry Greek philosophy and biblical teaching.

While the Greek influences continue to pervert Christian theology even today, some significant dissenting voices are calling believers to revisit the subject. In doing so it is crucial that the meanings of words like "soul," "spirit," and "body" be interpreted from their biblical rather than classical context. Eldon Ladd writes, "Recent scholarship has recognized that such terms as body, soul and spirit are not different, separable faculties of man but different ways of viewing the whole man."[2] Similarly John R. W. Stott pleads for "frank dialogue among evangelicals on the basis of Scripture."[3] Oscar Cullmann weighs in on the subject noting that the anthropology of the New Testament is not Greek but is connected with Jewish conceptions. He adds,

> For the concepts of body, soul, flesh, and spirit (to name only these), the New Testament does indeed use the same words as the Greek philosopher. But they mean something quite different, and we understand the whole New Testament amiss when we construe these concepts only from the point of view of Greek thought.[4]

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[1]Ibid., 63, 64.

[2]George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 457.

[3]John R. W. Stott and David Edwards, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 320.

[4]Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality,* ed. Terence Penelhum (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1973), 68.

To Cullmann, the two viewpoints are so different that he concludes, "The answer to the question, 'Immortality of the soul or resurrection of the dead in the New Testament,' is unequivocal. The teaching of the great philosophers Socrates and Plato can in no way be brought into consonance with that of the New Testament."[1]

Implications of Immortal-Soulism for Grieving

Belief in the immortality of the soul makes death to be an illusion. If the soul, the "real person," continues to live, then death indeed has not taken place. The real person has just moved to the real place. Paradise has already started for the deceased. Given this scenario, every thinking person will experience a tension between spontaneous sorrow and celebration of the beginning of the afterlife for their loved one.

If the belief were to run its full trajectory it would curtail the grieving process. The truth of the matter is that intuitively we perceive death as the "grim reaper" who is naturally followed by grief. If the "grim reaper" is thought to be the transition to paradise, there is an intuitive shadow of despair at a time when the blessed hope is thought to have been realized.

Indeed, Augustine's belief impacted his reaction to bereavement. In his *Confessions* he describes how he grieved over the death of a friend who died before Augustine was converted to Christianity. His reaction to grief was the natural outpouring of grief that could be expected in such a loss. In describing his feelings he says, "Only

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[1]Ibid., 85.

tears were sweet to me, for they succeeded my friend, in the dearest of my affections."[1] He further asserts how at that time he had lacked pleasure in anything and he chides himself because he had not raised his soul to God to be lightened by Him.[2]

Augustine's mother, Monica, died after he had become a Christian and had developed his Platonic Theology. He portrays her death as the freeing of her religious and holy soul from the body.[3] While he admits his own sorrow and the deep-felt urge to shed tears, he claims that his eyes, "by the violent command of my mind, drank up their fountain wholly dry; and woe was me in such a strife!"[4] He and the others checked the sudden outburst of grief in his son, Adeodatus, who was present then because to them she was neither unhappy nor altogether dead. Augustine also describes how he struggled to restrain any expression of grief and yet regrets the grief that he knew was in his heart.[5]

In his estimate, such human feelings were unbecoming for a Christian. For him, as for anyone else who chooses to believe as he did, the result was a further complication of the sorrow. He admits, "with a new grief I grieved for my grief, and was thus worn by a double sorrow."[6]

Belief in immortality also undermines the doctrine of the resurrection and the

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[1]Augustine, *Confessions* 4.9.

[2]Ibid., 4.12.

[3]Ibid., 9.28.

[4]Ibid., 9.29.

[5]Ibid., 9.29-31.

[6]Ibid., 9.31.

second coming of Christ. It makes the resurrection "an ambivalent return to materiality whose desirability is open to question."[1] If, as Wilhelm suggests, death is the climactic experience of our lives, then the resurrection is some sort of anticlimax. Bacchiocchi observes that immortal-soulism openly contradicts biblical teaching in which the Christian hope finds fulfillment at the second coming and not at death. He finds it to be a contributing factor to the diminished prominence of the doctrine of the Second Coming among both Catholics and Protestants.[2]

Belief in the immortality[3] of the soul poses a grave danger, particularly to someone going through grief. If the loved one for whom the mourner is grieving is actually alive, how powerful the enticement to seek an audience with the departed. This becomes especially problematic in the Zimbabwean context, where traditionally the dead were venerated and their counsel sought. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, therefore, swings open the door to spiritualism and gives Satan a foothold.

Platonic thought still pervades the most widely held views concerning the state of people in death. It may not be obvious to the people who hold those views and yet it is

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[1]Walters, 186.

[2]Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Biblical Perspective,* vol. 13, *Immortality or Resurrection* (Berrien Springs, MI: privately printed, 1997), 251.

[3]The belief of the immortality of the soul as taught by Greek philosophers suggested that the soul had no beginning and no end (see pages 32 and 33 above). The belief as reflected in many Christian churches and in African culture does not include the idea that the soul has no beginning. The emphasis is that the soul survives death. Some scholars, such as John Mbiti speak of the "living dead" rather than immortality of the soul. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 159-165.

just as real. Thus the doctrine of the immortality of the soul as taught by some Christians creates the same dilemma that Augustine had. On the one hand, the bereaved person experiences an overwhelming flow of sorrow, and on the other, he or she tries to uphold a philosophy whose logical conclusion belies feelings and expressions of grief. This doctrine, while complicating the grieving process, fails to offer much beyond the grave in real terms. Purporting to offer comfort to the bereaved, by assuring them that their loved one is blissful, it also insinuates that death is the end. The sad event that inevitably generates grief is supposed to be the gateway to bliss.

CHAPTER 3

GRIEF IN THE ZIMBABWEAN CULTURE

Grief and mourning are universal responses to loss. The mourning practices, however, vary from culture to culture. Since all cultures are dynamic, it should be expected that the expressions of grief may change with time. Even within a cultural group, the experience of grief differs from family to family and from individual to individual. Prevailing cultural norms and practices, however, tend to shape the grieving process.

The culture of Zimbabwe is by no means uniform. The two major tribes, Shonas and Ndebeles, though they both belong to the Bantu family, speak different languages and their cultures are diverse. The rituals and ceremonies they observe are often quite different. Even within each tribe there is much diversity based on dialect, clan, and location.[1] In the absence of written heritage, rituals tend to change as they are handed down to the succeeding generations. Since the descriptions and rationale for the ceremonies and rituals are handed down verbally to the next generation, there are variant customs in different places, even within the same tribe. It is, therefore, impossible to describe a Zimbabwean, Shona, or Ndebele culture that accurately reflects practices of the

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[1]M. S. C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona with Special Reference to Their Religion* (Gwelo, Rhodesia: Mambo, 1976), 231.

entire country even for a given time period. Because of the multiplicity of death rituals it is futile to try to chronicle the details of the rituals since it would be impossible to have a truly typical scenario. A more practical approach is to describe the generalities of the culture and the underlying beliefs.

Cultural Norms and Practices

Willoughby writes, "Bantu life is essentially religious." He adds that religion so pervades life that "it regulates their doings and leisure" to an extent that is hard for Westerners to understand.[1] While this assertion was true at the time it was penned, it would be an overstatement in describing contemporary Zimbabwean society. For better or worse, Westernization has influenced the African mind to view more and more areas of life as secular. However, it is still true that many rites and ceremonies that are prevalent in contemporary culture are an outgrowth of the Bantu religion. Willoughby is right when he suggests that Bantu religion is not so much thought out for verbal articulation as it is expressed in gesture-language, making ritual an important form of utterance.[2] Thus one does not find a clearly defined and consistent theology, but rather an elaborate system of ceremonies and rites to be performed in various occasions.

Underlying Beliefs

The underlying belief in the performance of death rituals is that the spirit of the

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[1]W. C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), 3.

[2]Ibid., xxv, xxvi.

deceased continues to live and will eventually become one of the ancestral spirits who will protect the living.[1] It is neither easy nor beneficial, within the context of this study, to try to discover the origin of this belief. It is sufficient to be aware that this belief is rampant and that it influences death rites. The most overt expression of this belief is seen when survivors speak to the deceased and consult more distant ancestors during the course of conducting the ceremonies.

Another underlying factor is the pervasive fear among the Bantu of the spirit of the dead.[2] The same superhuman quality that is thought to make it a protector also renders it potentially harmful. James L. Cox, in analyzing burial rituals performed for a man in Eastern Zimbabwe, notes that the spirit that has not yet been "canonized" into the realm of ancestral spirits is potentially harmful. This necessitates the proper treatment of the body, as it can be dangerous.[3] A commonly held belief is that the deceased's spirit, if offended, causes a "shadow" on the floor or the wall while the deceased lies in state. No one may enter the room or touch the corpse until the shadow disappears after a diviner determines the cause and gives instructions on the appropriate ritual to perform.[4] Thus, the burial procedure can become quite cumbersome, and often concerned members of the family or community chip in with advice as the ritual proceeds. Bourdillon describes a

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[1]Ibid., 2.

[2]Ibid., 76.

[3]James L. Cox, "Ancestors, the Sacred and God: Reflections on the Meaning of the Sacred in Zimbabwean Death Rituals," *Religion* 25 (October 1995): 342.

[4]Bourdillon, 232.

burial that he witnessed in which the corpse was laid three times into the grave in different positions while two elders argued about the direction the head should point.[1] Such exactitude arises from the fear of offending the spirit of the dead person, and Adventists are not immune to this.[2]

A further underlying factor is the desire among many to ascertain the cause of death. Even among many educated people whose scientific knowledge should help them to understand causes of illness and death, there is the feeling that above and beyond the organic causes of illness and death, there are spiritual powers at play. This feeling, while it may not be articulated verbally, accounts for the consultation of diviners following a death even in cases where the cause of death is apparent.

Because of the religious significance of rites it is expected that they should be performed correctly according to the prevailing expectation. Failure to correctly perform the rituals is believed to bring peril to the family, presently or in later generations. The spirit of an "aggrieved" ancestor is thought to withdraw its protection from the family, allowing an enemy, human or spirit, access to harm the family. Cox cites a ritual in which a family went to a diviner to determine the cause of death. The diviner concluded that an ancestral spirit had withdrawn his protection because he was not buried correctly. The

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[1]Ibid., 235.

[2]I attended one funeral in which the family patriarch, an elderly Adventist pastor, was swayed back and forth by family members who angrily argued about the place of burial, whether the deceased's place of birth or his current home, near his parents-in-laws' homestead. The quarreling parties could not agree on which place constituted the deceased's real home.

"offended" ancestor had been buried by the deceased's paternal grandfather.[1]

Surprising as this may be to foreigners, there is a commonly held notion that ancestral spirits will mete out punishment to someone other than the perpetrator of a particular grievance. The "victim," in many cases, is not able to perform the rites that are deemed necessary to appease the aggrieved spirit. That role is usually someone else's prerogative, an uncle, a paternal aunt or other relative, usually outside the immediate family. Thus the "victim" of the aggrieved spirit is often viewed as a helpless person who may not even be able to personally correct the situation. Naturally, this imposes tremendous social pressure on those who may refuse to participate in performing certain rites because they become the culprits. The extended family blames them for being unconcerned because the effect of their violations does not touch them personally. Most death rituals are family or community events. Specific persons, by virtue of their place in the family or community, are expected to facilitate the rites by playing one role or another.[2] These expectations often pose problems for Christians, particularly Adventists, who find certain ceremonies inconsistent with biblical teaching.

Common Death Rituals

Because of the variations in rituals, descriptions will be limited to broad generalities. Any attempt to be more detailed is bound to focus on specific areas and

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[1]Cox, 339-355.

[2]Ibid., 343. Cox's article discusses three different rituals that were observed and in each of them the chief, the family elder or other specified members of the family had roles that were culturally assigned to them.

would not accurately represent the rest of the country. In fact, many of the rituals described by some authors have already changed because of cultural shifts. In this section I will describe in broad terms three death rituals, namely the funeral, the inheritance ceremony, and the "canonization" of the spirit of the deceased.

The Funeral

Shortly after death the relatives and the community come to the bereaved family as soon as possible. Usually it is essential to formally inform the chief and other specified relatives who could be offended if such a formality is overlooked. An animal is slaughtered to be served to the mourners who will attend. In some situations the deceased is addressed before the slaughter takes place, thus adding a ritual dimension to the killing of the animal. A specified relative of the deceased selects the burial spot, performs the ground-breaking ritual for the grave, and then others take over in digging the grave and collecting stones that will be used in the burial process (see below).[1]

In many places the burial takes place in the morning, as long as it is before ten o'clock or in the afternoon after four o'clock, but never around the noon hour. The explanation given is that no baby is born during the noon hour, therefore no burial should take place then.[2] The association of burial and birth suggests that there is an inherent notion among the people that in dying one is, in fact, being born into another realm of

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[1]Michael Gelfand, *Shona Ritual: With Special Reference to the Chaminuka Cult* (Cape Town: Juta & Co., 1959), 184-185.

[2]Michael Gelfand, *The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona: A Study Based on Field Work Among the East-Central Shona* (Gwelo, Rhodesia: Mambo, 1977), 41.

existence.

Just before the corpse is brought out of the room where it has spent the night, the mourners are informed and they come to witness the event and to make a procession to the burial place. It is customary for the pallbearers to make a circuit around the house before proceeding to the grave. Along the way there are frequent stops that are meant to give rest to the deceased. At each stop the pallbearers rotate the corpse so that the head points in the opposite direction. The purported purpose for these maneuvers is to disorient the spirit of the deceased so that it does not come back to the homestead prematurely, as this would be disastrous to the family, in one way or another.[1]

At the grave site a son-in-law or a ritual friend (*sahwira),* depending on the prevailing custom, climbs into the grave and with an appointed assistant, lays the body (nowadays almost always in a coffin, unless the family is destitute) into the grave. The body is often tucked away into a section dug in the side of the grave at the bottom. Flat stones are laid along the opening to this dug-out section so that the body is closed in. In other cases a trench is dug at the bottom of the grave that accommodates the coffin neatly. Flat stones are laid over the coffin, sitting on the ledges that are formed by the digging of the trench. In either case those performing the burial are careful in laying the rocks so that soil is not thrown onto the coffin during burial. Often more rocks are thrown into the grave after it is partly filled. One explanation for the use of rocks is the desire to deter

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[1]Bourdillon, 234, 235.

witches from exhuming the body.[1] Before the men begin to shovel the soil to fill the grave, those present throw a pinch of soil each and they may say a few words of farewell to the deceased.[2] After the grave is filled, the mourners return to the homestead and shortly afterwards disperse, leaving close relatives who may stay on for a day or two longer.

At various points during the funeral the survivors speak to the deceased, either bidding farewell or making other consultations with him or her. The family may also choose to inquire from a diviner as to the cause of death. The diviner consults with the spirits before he or she reveals to the family the cause of death. It should be mentioned here that the diviner will almost always attribute death to witchcraft, an avenging spirit, or some violation that results in the ancestral spirits withholding protection. Such consultations almost always end in family discord or in the need for more rituals to appease some ancestral or avenging spirit.

The brief description given above shows that the funeral ceremony is replete with rituals that presuppose the survival of the spirit of the deceased.

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[1]Eli B. Magava, "African Customs Connected with the Burial of the Dead in Rhodesia," in *Christianity South of the Zambezi,* ed. J. A. Dachs (Gwelo, Rhodesia: Mambo, 1973), 153. People give other explanations for the use of rocks. One explanation is the impropriety of dumping soil onto a coffin or a dead body. Another explanation, particularly for the other rocks, is the need to reinforce the soil above the coffin so that when a tombstone is eventually laid there is little possibility for the soil beneath to sag due to the effect of rain water. It seems to me that many people follow these practices and when asked they give an explanation that is in keeping with their belief system.

[2]Gelfand, *The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona,* 42, 94.

The Inheritance Ceremony

The inheritance ceremony takes place anytime from a few days after the funeral to a full year later.[1] Prevailing custom and the circumstances of the family dictate this. At this time the care of the surviving family is formally arranged. The "master of ceremonies" for this event is a culturally determined relative. Practices vary by regions and clans.

Perhaps the most significant part of this ceremony, in the case of the death of a married man, is the determination of who will inherit the widow. The most common inheritors are brothers of the deceased, though in some places other relatives may qualify. Usually the widow and the inheritor have made consultation beforehand and then formalize the arrangement during the ceremony. The widow signifies her acceptance of the inheritor by publicly giving to him a token that has been given to her for the purpose. This could be a knobkerrie (club) or a cup full of beer or water. If she is unwilling to marry any of the possible inheritors, she demonstrates it by laying the token down three times.[2]

The estate of the deceased is distributed according to the relationship that the inheritors had to the deceased. The eldest son usually inherits the father's cattle, taking care that none of the mother's cattle are included in this. Taking the mother's cattle, particularly those received as part of the brideprice from the marriage of a daughter, is a

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[1]Ibid., 241.

[2]Bourdillon, 250. See also Gelfand, *The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona,* 44 and Gelfand, *Shona Ritual,* 191.

grievous offense that is believed to precipitate the ire of her spirit after her death. The deceased's brothers and children and other members of the extended family are allocated a portion of the estate.[1] The estate should be distributed according to the traditional social restraint, otherwise, it is believed, there will be disastrous consequences. A widow traditionally does not receive any of the estate and in some cases may be left destitute as the estate is seized by the family of the deceased.[2]

In all fairness, it should be pointed out that the inheritance ceremony has been affected and modified by a number of factors. Economic concerns and the increasing dominance of monogamous families have made inroads into this ceremony. Likewise the rising popularity of making wills, the requirements of the legal system, and a recognition of the boundaries of the nucleus family and their material needs, now largely confines the inheritance ceremony to the distribution of inexpensive items which are increasingly viewed as keepsakes.

In the execution of the inheritance ceremony there is consultation of the spirit and the use of traditional beer. Even though contemporary trends are moderating the inheritance ceremony, there is still the possibility that those responsible for the distribution of the estate will be insensitive to the deceased's immediate family and their needs. The possibility still remains for surviving brothers to become polygamous after inheriting a widow. With the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe, the inheritance of an infected widow might, in time, deal a second blow to the family.

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[1]Gelfand, *The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona*, 44.

[2]Bourdillon, 250, 251.

The Canonization of the Spirit

When a person dies, his spirit is not believed to immediately join the company of the ancestral spirits. A special ceremony is conducted some time after the funeral, usually a year later, to "bring the spirit home." This event brings the extended family, and sometimes the immediate community, together. It should be remembered that soon after death the survivors are uneasy with the spirit of the dead and did some maneuvers to disorient it so that it would not find its way back home. The purpose of this ceremony is to raise the spirit to the realm of ancestral spirits and to "bring it home."[1]

Bourdillon observes that despite the many variations, there is a common pattern to the ceremony:

> A large number of relatives and friends of the deceased gather to sing and dance in honor of the spirit through most of one night; there follows in the morning a procession to the grave or some other spot outside the homestead where various rituals are performed including generous libations of millet beer, and the spirit is requested to come home; this is followed by further music and feasting in the homestead to welcome the spirit home.[2]

In the process of performing the various rituals, those who lead out speak or pray to the spirit of the deceased, inviting it back to the home and recognizing its new status among the ancestors. They also speak to other ancestral spirits to accept him among their ranks. It is necessary to formally address the spirit ancestors because culturally the deceased cannot be accepted without this formal ceremony. One may not consider

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[1]Ibid., 242.

[2]Ibid., 243.

something as his or hers until it is verbally and formally handed over. Thus the spirit of the deceased is in limbo, detached, from the living but not yet united to the ancestral spirits until it is formally brought back home in this ceremony.[1]

Participants at this ceremony honor the spirit by clapping at specified moments. Women may also ululate (to make a sound like a wolf and breaking it by gently patting the mouth) to signify their joy and approval. The joy expressed on this occasion comes from a relief that the spirit is at last reconciled to the rest of the ancestors at the time they accept it into their ranks. The spirit is also now able to come to the aid of the living since they have brought it back home. Thus the family is deemed to be reunited as the spirit begins to interact again with the living and the dead.[2]

It is common that these rituals are associated with trances in which the possessed persons speak in the name of a departed ancestor. Cox records a canonization ceremony in South-western Zimbabwe, reported to him by Brighton Ncube. In this ceremony the officiating witch doctor spoke in an unintelligible language following which, one of the deceased's sons went into a trance, supposedly possessed by his father's spirit. Blood relatives came to him in that state and presented their problems asking for the spirit's intervention.[3]

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[1]Kumbirai, 124-126.

[2]Ibid., 127.

[3]Cox, 346.

Issues of Conflict

From the brief survey of the death ritual performed in Zimbabwe it is quite clear that a significant part of the traditional ceremonies involves practices that are contrary to biblical teaching. The belief that the spirit continues to live after death, which necessitates many of the rituals, is an outgrowth of Satan's lie that humans would not surely die (Gen 3:4). In whatever way this belief is expressed, whether Greek mythology and philosophy or in African gestures, it is a falsehood that Satan uses to deceive and ultimately to destroy those who subscribe to it.

The reverence with which the spirits are treated effectively deifies them and thus violates the very first of the ten commandments. Some scholars of African Traditional religions have sought to diminish the reality of ancestral worship. A common strategy is to highlight the fact that Africans believe in one Supreme Being and the ancestral spirits are only intermediaries. Some proponents of this view have asserted:

> The indigenous religions of Zimbabwe share a common faith in the existence of a Supreme Being who is believed to be the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. That Supreme Being is known by various names. These names include Mwari, which is widely used among the Shona people. The equivalent among the Ndebele is uNkulunkulu or uMlimu.[1]

While this assertion is true it is also true that the rituals and prayers in cultural rituals revolve around the ancestral spirits rather than the Supreme Being. Bourdillon notes that because of the lack of a systematic theology, the Shona ideas of God are nebulous and the

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[1]G. ter Haar, A. Moyo, and S. J. Nondo, eds., *African Traditional Religions in Religious Education: A Resource Book with Special Reference to Zimbabwe* (Utrecht: Utrecht University Press, 1992), 7, quoted in Cox, 349.

belief in Him is operative only in rare occasions.[1] Invocations of the spirits are therefore a form of spiritism and a worship of a false god.

The belief in a superhuman influence underlying and overruling all significant events, while it has a parallel notion in biblical teaching, ceases to be helpful when it motivates people to consult the witch doctor in order to discover the reason for death. These consultations, invariably, lead to additional rituals to the dead, accusations of witchcraft or ritual omissions, all resulting in family discord. This belief also leads people to live in constant uncertainty, if not fear, that the fickle spirits may launch an attack on them for an offense they may not be directly responsible for or even have knowledge of.

The traditional way of distributing the estate of the deceased demonstrates lack of consideration for the immediate family. In the absence of a will or legal intervention some families may be left destitute at a time when they are grieving and in need of financial resources. A widow, for example, in economic desperation, may be forced to marry her husband's brother. This sometimes results in polygamous relationships. In the case of the death of a wife, her younger sister, or some other specified female relative, may be pressured to marry the widower, often a much older man.

With the HIV/AIDS pandemic ravaging Zimbabwe and if the surviving spouse is a carrier, these structured marriages can multiply tragedy within the family. Fortunately, because of Western influences, the inheriting of wives and the traditional marriage of the deceased's younger sister or relative is experiencing a decline, enduring only in the most

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[1]M. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1982), 267, quoted in Cox, 351.

traditional communities.

As indicated earlier, the absence of literary record distorts the reasons and beliefs underlying some rituals and practices. Different communities may have the same custom but offer different reasons for the practice. The result is that even among Adventists there is no consensus on what practices are appropriate for a Christian burial. There are some practices that are clearly inappropriate, and there is generally a consensus among members that Christians should not engage in them.

The impropriety of other practices is not so easy to judge. An example is the common practice, in some places, in which women who have married into the extended family of the deceased tie a piece of bark fiber to the wrist or to the head of the dead person's relatives. The relatives are not supposed to untie it themselves. The women will remove the bark fiber after they get a small sum of money from each of the relatives. For some Adventists, this practice is sinister and totally unacceptable. To them the practice arises from and reinforces superstitious beliefs. Other Adventists overlook the practice as a cultural way to temper the grim atmosphere with a little lightheartedness and to help to identify the deceased's relatives so that members of the community can offer their condolences. There is no consensus among members on whether such practices were merely functional or had a superstitious background.

It is obvious that there are areas of conflict between traditional death customs and Adventist thought and practice. There is conflict that centers on rituals that affirm the basic premise that the spirit is immortal. There is also the conflict that arises from the superstitions, fear of the spirits, and a desire to divine causes of death. Contemporary

standards of ethics also lead many to question some inheritance customs as practiced traditionally. In addition to these areas of conflict there is the tension that arises from practices of unknown origins. This last category presents tension within the community of faith rather than between Christianity and culture.

How should believers respond to these areas of conflict? First it is necessary to recognize that the interaction of the gospel and culture is not unique to Zimbabwe. From ancient times God's people have encountered culture. They rejected some aspects of culture that were inconsistent with their theology. For example, God commanded Israel not to mutilate or disfigure themselves when mourning for the dead (Deut 14:1). Besides the injury to their body, God was concerned that they should not participate in rites that were associated with pagan religions. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes that the shaving of hair had religious significance in idol worship.[1] It also suggests that by refraining from these practices they were demonstrating their knowledge of a future life and in essence were following Paul's injunction not to weep as those who have no hope (1 Thess 4:13).[2] On the other hand God's people did not exist in a cultural vacuum. Xuan Huong Thi Pham, writes, "On the whole, the mourning rites of biblical Israel are strikingly parallel to those of the ancient Near East."[3]

Believers should, therefore, reject all cultural rites that venerate idols or spirits.

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[1]H. L. E. Luering, "Hair,"*ISBE, 2:1320, 1321.*

[2]Jacob W. Kapp, "Baldness," *ISBE, 1:380, 381.*

[3]Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1999), 27.

They should also discard any practice that negates or diminishes the truth of the resurrection. However, it is not necessary to reject rites just because they come from a particular culture.

The Cultural Support System for the Grieving

The cultural, support system for the grieving involves members of the extended family, relatives, and the entire community, each playing a greater or lesser role at the funeral time and beyond. Traditionally major events, such as funerals and weddings, tend to draw everyone together, including strangers who may be in the neighborhood. Social pressure constrains individuals to attend and to make contributions lest in their own time of bereavement the community shuns them. The bereaved family is thus never left to grieve in solitude.

The friends and relatives who come to comfort the family usually stay until the burial. Even neighbors may opt to spend the night at the bereaved family's house. The family is not expected to provide normal sleeping arrangements, though sometimes they go out of their way to cater for distinguished persons. After burial, when the community disperses, some close relatives still stay with the family for several days. The family is therefore not neglected immediately after the funeral.

One support structure that culture has provided for the bereaved is a framework of the persons who perform predetermined roles. Since this is already in place before the crisis begins, the bereaved family has a blueprint to work with as they plan for funerary rites. The different relatives generally have an idea of what is expected of them and each

category of kinship (aunts, uncles, nephews, in-laws, etc.) only has to decide which of them will actually perform the expected task. This, too, is often predetermined by seniority or is assigned by the senior person in each category.

It should be noted that there will never be a category that cannot be represented due to the extended nature of family relationships. Thus there can never be a family without a daughter-in-law, for instance, because women married to certain specified levels of the extended family become daughters-in-law. Even in unusual cases where a real relative cannot be found, networks that are forged in the community are often defined as kinship and can at times be employed should that become necessary.

The assignment of roles also helps to involve many people in death rites. This provides an opportunity for many to express their loss, verbally or by participation in certain rituals. By participating in the different roles, the whole family faces the reality of the death of their loved one. Denial of the reality of the death thus is minimized.

The constant flow of relatives and friends coming to pay their condolences typically results in spontaneous expressions of grief. Women usually burst into wailing while men generally shed tears with more restrained sobs as they meet the latest arrivals. The repeated episodes of mourning help with the recovery process by providing emotional catharsis. As relatives and members of the community arrive they each gravitate towards a group of people that is within their comfort zone and often there is a close relative of the deceased. As they offer their condolences they usually ask how the deceased died, giving the close relatives present an opportunity to give an account of the loss from his or her perspective. By the time burial takes place, members of the family

will have had a chance to relate the story, often several times to different people and the process aids in the healing process.

Some funerary customs are meant to lighten the mood of the mourners. Women who married into the family, that is daughters-in-law, sometimes kneel in front of the funeral procession just before it reaches the grave. The only way to get them to move away is to give them a small sum of money, after which they ululate in appreciation. As indicated earlier, they may collect some other money from members of the family to untie a piece of bark fiber from the wrist or head. The money collected in this way is used to buy refreshments or sometimes a chicken that the group of daughters-in-law prepares and eats together.

Cultural etiquette forbids *vakuwasha*[1] to exact money for their services; however, after they slaughter the animal, a specified portion is allocated to them and they share it among themselves. The process of working and eating together fosters fellowship and establishes networks among the relatives and brings together people who have a similar relationship to the family. Funerals, thus, often bring together people who may not have known one another before and by grieving and working together they make contact and establish networks.

In many localities there is occasion for humor by specified persons. Sometimes this role is filled by the family's ritual friend (*sahwira*)[2] who may make jesting remarks

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[1] *Vakuwasha* are sons-in-law or brothers-in-law (who married your sisters).

[2] This is a trusted family friend. This friend has obligations to assist in times of crisis, confronts, and rebukes (sometimes publicly) those who err.

about the deceased or the survivors to the amusement of all present. In other areas daughters-in-law may mimic what the deceased was known to do in life. Contemporary opinions about some of these practices are mixed. The younger generation usually sees little value in these customs. Indeed there are occasional instances of indiscretion in which the role players indulge in inappropriate jesting.[1] However, many who have suffered a personal loss and have experienced judicious humor in this context have testified to its usefulness. They find that humor functions as "a handle for the problem -- a way of cutting it down to manageable size."[2]

The different ceremonies that are conducted in connection with the dead offer opportunities for the family to come together and to reminisce over their loss. The presence of the relatives who come from time to time helps to heal the bereaved. While Christians may not concur with the rituals and their intended purpose, the occasions when rituals are performed help the family to do the work of grieving. As one ceremony follows another, the family experiences a forward movement. The family sees the passing of each successive step in the process and anticipates and prepares for the next. In this way the bereaved have repeated opportunities to deal with grief and yet to look forward to an upcoming event.

One weakness in the traditional support system is the absence of specific ways to help children. Much that happens at funerals and afterwards focuses on and is executed

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[1]At one funeral that I attended a ritual friend divulged in this jest that the deceased had died from AIDS. Cultural etiquette forbids taking any drastic measures against a ritual friend even when their actions are deemed inappropriate.

[2]Edgar N. Jackson, *The Many Faces of Grief* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 42.

by adults. In olden days children were deliberately excluded from funerals to shield them from the horror. Today children may be present but they are often left to themselves and hardly have any role to play. Often they may be overlooked by the people who come to pay their condolences, perhaps because they do not display overt grief reactions. The truth is that children grieve, just as adults do, but with limited resources to cope because of their inexperience. Judy Tatelbaum writes:

> Although the signs of grief in children may be less obvious than in adults, children do grieve. Their reactions to grief are complicated by their often unconscious attempts to mask feelings and by their defensive behavior. Children may react defensively to the news of a death by denial, blandness, brazenness, even joking, any of which may dismay or anger adults around them.[1]

Another weakness in the support system is the lack of a studied and researched approach to grief ministry. There is no provision, in the traditional setting, for professional help to those who may have complications arising from unresolved grief. While the intuitive responses that the community brings to mourners are meaningful and appropriate, much more could be done when the consolers are guided by findings of modern research into the dynamics of grief.

To my knowledge there is no literature that attempts to synthesize researched findings on grief management with the cultural support system. I have no knowledge of individuals who have experienced complications of unresolved grief. My lack of knowledge is partly because, at the time I lived in Zimbabwe, grief management was not a primary focus to me. Another possible reason for this ignorance may be the fact that,

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[1]Tatelbaum, 63.

typically, people in the Zimbabwean community will not readily share that kind of information.

The two weakness that I have identified in the cultural support system need to be addressed. I will cite them, among other matters, as recommendations in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Impact of Urbanization and Westernization on Funeral Rites and Support Systems

Traditionally the people of Zimbabwe lived in family clusters in the rural areas. It is common to have villages named after the most populous family, which is usually the family line from which the headman or chief is appointed. This setup meant that the extended family was concentrated in the same village. While there might be some significant relatives in other districts, there was a core at hand that could promptly provide the needed functions in the event of a death in the family.

With the coming of the European settlers, many natives were displaced from fertile land and transplanted to far away districts. The legislation of the 1930 Land Apportionment Act, and the 1969 Land Tenure Act that replaced it, displaced and transplanted more and more of the inhabitants to other regions of the country.[1] The movements of people brought about an intermingling of cultures from the different sections of the country. The families were not always relocated in proximity to their kin. Ceremonies became more difficult to perform because now some members of the

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[1]Harold D. Nelson, *Zimbabwe: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: American University, 1983), 138-144.

extended family needed to travel to make this possible.

The rise of industrialization caused many to leave the rural homes and to go to the cities. Life in the city made it impractical to perform the ceremonies of the African religion. Kapenzi observes that in the city it is impossible to arrange for a traditional ceremony since it is not possible to assemble all the relatives. Those who may appropriately officiate at such events might not be readily available. On the other hand he has observed some ceremonies in the city, but because of the lack of the appropriate instruments or utensils, substitutes are used.[1] However, when this is done there is a determination to perform the ceremony in the orthodox fashion when the opportunity comes.[2] Further, the ancestral spirits are perceived to remain attached to their native abode making it futile to hold a ceremony in their honor in the city.[3]

Another effect of urbanization is the curtailment of the support that was available to the bereaved. Because of distance and the difficulty in always getting time off work some people fail to attend funerals and may only be able to visit the bereaved family some time later when it becomes convenient. Those who are able to attend usually have limited time for the ceremonies. The result is that the working city dwellers now tend to determine the rhythm of the ceremonies. Thus, funerals may be delayed or expedited to

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[1]Instruments and utensils used in traditional rituals include clay pots, wooden plates or bowls, *mukombe* (a drinking utensil made out of gourd), traditional percussion musical instruments, and other items.

[2]Geoffrey Z. Kapenzi, *The Clash of Cultures: Christian Missionaries and the Shona of Rhodesia* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979), 51.

[3]Ibid.

accommodate certain significant relatives who may have job-related obligations.

Funerals that are conducted in the cities take a different tone from those in the rural areas. The urban environment makes some of the ceremonies obsolete. Instead of slaughtering an animal, the family will, most likely, purchase the meat. Relatives do not have to select the burial site nor do they have to dig the grave since the city councils provide for this. There are also some roles that have become commercialized. An undertaker is engaged to prepare the body for burial, to move the body to church or to the cemetery in a hearse, and to lower the coffin into the grave.

Many people have resorted to joining burial societies, an insurance program of some sort, to which they make regular payments. The burial society provides some basic material needs such as food, a coffin, and transportation when a member dies.[1] Other members of the burial societies may attend or run the funeral arrangements for the deceased member. Sometimes the activities of burial societies become dominant and they run counter to church programs. Consequently many leaders in the Adventist Church discourage members from joining burial societies.

Zimbabwe's independence from colonial rule ushered in new opportunities for education for the masses. The pursuit of an education and the subsequent employment in urban centers took the younger generation away from the village. This has resulted in further erosion of the traditional and cultural ways. Once educated, the youth approach

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[1]Bourdillon, 1976, 254.

life from a different perspective, taking many of their cues from the Western world.[1]

Because of the ever growing tendency to follow Western funeral customs, Africans feel obligated to pay large amounts of money to conduct a "decent" funeral. The AIDS pandemic often involves multiple deaths in the same family, thus straining financial resources. This problem seems to be so common in many African nations that many community leaders are beginning to speak out against extravagance in funerals.[2]

It may not be possible to revert to traditional burials, nor is that altogether desirable. There is, nonetheless, a need for moderation in spending, particularly among Adventists who should have a sense of stewardship and a theological understanding of death as a state of unconsciousness. Expenses could be reduced by avoiding flamboyance and excesses while maintaining dignity. The survivors should also be encouraged to participate more in funerary rites instead of depending on funeral directors for all activities. Instead of hiring the hearse, for instance, they could use another vehicle owned by a relative or a friend at a much lower cost.

Culture is dynamic and change is inevitable. Our concern should not be to block the tide of change. Indeed, some of the changes that have come because of Western influences and urbanization help to end immoral and inappropriate practices. Instead of wistfully longing for the culture of yesteryear, we should concern ourselves with finding ways to maintain an adequate support system for the bereaved in a fast-changing

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[1]Nelson, 73.

[2]Gri Newsreel, "NCCE Official Warns Against Expensive Funerals," 18 March 1999, http://www.mclglobal.com/History/Mar1999/18c9n.html#e (11 April 2005).

environment. We should also be concerned about the material needs of orphans and other dependant survivors and, where appropriate, curtail the expenses that come with funerals.

Impact of AIDS on Funeral Rites and Support Systems

AIDS has had a much broader impact on Zimbabwe and the rest of Africa than previously anticipated. Many of the projections that were made, when AIDS first surfaced, focused on the health system, the economy, death rates, and the plight of surviving children. AIDS has already started to make an impact on the culture of the people, particularly on funeral rites and the support systems for the bereaved.

The World Health Organization projected that by the year 2000 the weekly death toll from AIDS in Zimbabwe would have reached 2,400.[1] The current death rate exceeds this estimate by a wide margin. By 2003 an estimated 2,600 adults and 690 children died each week as a result of AIDS.[2] The rising death rate brings with it a financial and emotional strain on the community. While traditional culture dictated that relatives spend some days with the bereaved family, this is becoming increasingly impractical. In many parts of Africa the mourning period has been truncated.[3] The shortened mourning period

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[1]World Health Organization, "Children on the Brink," *AIDS Epidemic Update,* December 1998, www.whqlibdoc.who.int/unaids/1998/a62410.pdf (April, 11, 2005), 8.

[2]World Health Organization, "Main Public Health Issues and Concerns: Health Status, *Zimbabwe,* November 2004, www.who.int/hac/crises/zwe/background/en/zimbabwe_2-pager.pdf (April 11.005), 1. See also "Zimbabwe Crisis: UN Appeals for $95 Million," *EuropaWorld,* February 4, 2004, www.europaworld.org/week171/zimbabwe2404.htm (April 11, 2005), 1.

[3]Donald G. McNeil, Jr., "AIDS Takes a Toll on Africa, Even After Death," in *New York Times* 16 December, 1998.

meets the needs of the relatives who need to go back to see to their livelihood. It also helps the bereaved family to minimize the expenses associated with protracted feeding of the mourners. On the other hand, the brief mourning period leaves the family without the comfort they need.

The fear of infection and stigma associated with AIDS has left many families unwilling to participate personally in preparing the body for burial.[1] This has been relegated to funeral directors with added expenses. This also results in less involvement with the deceased, thus leaving a void in the mourning process. There is less talk about how the deceased died because of the stigma associated with AIDS. This leaves the family with fewer opportunities to express themselves and to engage in the grieving process.

Because many of the victims of AIDS are young adults, who are the family breadwinners, there is a sudden surge of orphans into a community whose resources are fast declining. While it used to be said that there are no orphans in Africa, the situation has quickly changed. The uncles and aunts who used to provide the primary net of protection to orphaned children are themselves being decimated by AIDS. The secondary net, the grandparents, in many cases is overburdened by too many orphans who need care.[2] The grandparents, typically, have limited financial resources and may find it too physically taxing to cope with the increased demands. The result is that often the orphans are neglected and even abused because they are placed under the care of those who are

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[1]Ibid.

[2]World Health Organization, 8.

unwilling or ill-prepared to care for them. Because the social safety nets have broken down, there are many households in Zimbabwe that are headed by adolescents and children, some as young as eleven.

The community of faith needs to weave another safety net to care for their own orphans, at least, and as much as is possible for others. Long-term care for bereaved children is desperately needed. The church should attempt to provide care for dependants of the deceased. This should be done by families where possible. Where this is not possible, the church could provide a family-like setting for the care of orphaned children. There could be ways of involving the children in self-help projects to meet their material needs. The occupation of the orphans in productive pursuits would give them a sense of well-being and a sense of control over their affairs. It would also provide them with skills that they would use for their future upkeep and thus minimize the dangers of exploitation. The modalities of the care of orphans are beyond the scope of this dissertation. I recommend that the Church in Zimbabwe should study how to meet these needs which relate to bereavement.

CHAPTER 4

A CRITIQUE OF THE CHURCH'S APPROACH AND MESSAGE IN GRIEF SITUATIONS

The Adventist church in Zimbabwe is very active at funerals. The involvement of the church at funerals depends on the needs and on the latitude the church is given by the bereaved family. In most cases the Women's Ministries Department helps to prepare meals and to make a shroud. The services of the Women's Ministries Department are usually very prominent as the women are dressed in their uniforms, providing tangible and visible support to the bereaved.

However, the most coveted form of ministry at funerals is the conducting of services and the preaching of the Word. To many Adventists, the other aspects of ministry at funerals of non-Adventists are a means to open the door to preaching. It is noteworthy that it is this valued part of ministry that has the potential to comfort the bereaved and to inspire hope or to offend them. The preaching services are such a prominent part of funerals that, to a great extent, they determine the impression that is left in the minds of the people.

This chapter is an analysis of the church's ministry in bereavement situations. It will discuss the doctrinal emphasis of the Adventist Church as well as the passion to

evangelize and how these relate to this ministry. The chapter will also discuss *nyaradzo,* a service that has taken root in some Christian circles, with mixed acceptance. Finally, I will discuss the relevance of the Christian teaching in general, and the Adventist doctrine in particular to grief situations.

Concern for Doctrinal Purity

One of the strengths of the Adventist church worldwide is its tireless effort to establish and teach sound doctrines which are systematically drawn from the Bible. This is no accident, given the fact that the movement arose from William Miller's methodical analysis of the prophecies. The Bible conferences that were conducted in the early history of the church helped to forge our fundamental beliefs. Undoubtedly the pioneers were very concerned about accuracy in doctrine. Perhaps it is this regard for exactitude in articulating doctrine that still makes the church speak of conversion to the Adventist Church as "finding the truth."

Our strength, as a church, has sometimes exposed us to criticism by those who perceive us as proud and intolerant. To them, our claim to "the truth" is bigotry. Because of the distinctive truths that we hold, they brand us as a sect or a cult. Ironically, the very truths that have earned us this label are our most cherished ones, and we believe that the purpose for our existence as a church is to propagate these messages that no other church group preaches. Thus, these very doctrines play a major role in defining our identity as a church. It is not surprising, therefore, that in our evangelism we place an emphasis on these distinctive truths.

When the church was planted in Zimbabwe at the end of the nineteenth century, doctrine was emphasized by the missionaries. The pupils at the church schools were taught that they, in turn, should be sent out to teach at various outstations.[1] This was a noble and effective way to reach as many of the natives as possible with our distinctive truths. Without doubt the teaching of our distinctive truths played a positive role in the growth of the church.

While the church continued to grow and to enter new territory in this way, other church groups began to feel antagonized by Adventist preachers. Ngwabi Bhebe, writing concerning this time period, concludes that it was the "Adventists' fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and their lack of respect for other societies' sphere of operation which not only irritated their neighbours, but also caused the Native Department to keep a close watch on the African preachers."[2] One of the charges against the Adventists was that they told people that their teachers were lying to them and that God did not respect their religion and He hated their falsehood.[3] If Adventists charged other denominations of lying, it would be in doctrinal teaching.

Bhebe does not specify the falsehood that the Adventist preachers attacked. However, because the cultural funerary rites, particularly in those early days when they were not yet much moderated by Western influences, stood in such stark contrast to our

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[1]W. H. Anderson, *On the Trail of Livingstone* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1919), 143-144.

[2]Ngwabi Bhebe, *Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe* (London: Longman, 1979), 132.

[3]Ibid., 132, 133.

belief in unconsciousness in death, they would have, among other things, attracted the preachers' negative attention. Even though the complaints leveled against Adventists at that time were not specifically about conditionalism, it is not far-fetched to imagine that this was a point of conflict. The friction illustrates the disposition of Adventists to persistently teach distinguishing doctrines and the antagonism that it can stir up. From an Adventist perspective, such complaints are not justified. The church does have a biblical mandate to proclaim these aspects of truth that are overlooked by others. However, the purpose of preaching these doctrines is to help the hearers to accept them. It is therefore important that we present those doctrines in a way and in settings that will help people to accept them.

Despite the policy of the Adventist Church that discourages doctrinal sermons at funerals, some pastors and members routinely preach the state of the dead. This practice is fostered by expectations from some members to hear a presentation on the state of the dead, particularly if it is apparent that there are many non-Adventists in attendance.[1] When, occasionally, Adventists share a funeral with other denominations they are quick to observe if the other preachers allude to the immortality of the soul.[2] There have been occasions when an Adventist preacher, in a subsequent service, takes the pains to correct

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[1]At one funeral where I preached a non-doctrinal sermon with many non-members in attendance, an Adventist elder later approached me and complained that I had wasted an opportunity. He had expected me to preach about the state of the dead.

[2]It is only natural for anyone to quickly notice teachings that do not conform to one's own theological paradigm and to be critical of them. Adventists should be commended when they distinguish truth from error. Those who object to the teachings of Adventists are in a sense also detecting a difference between their teachings and the Adventists'.

the falsehood by preaching a doctrinal sermon on the state of the dead. When sharing funeral services with other denominations, Adventists generally prefer to make their presentations after the other denominations. Thus if they can influence the order of the services, they will generally choose the concluding part and in so doing they can conveniently correct any doctrinal errors made by other preachers without having to face a rebuttal. The concluding part also leaves the truth fresh in the minds of the hearers.

Those who preach doctrinal sermons at funerals often claim that they secure decisions for baptism as a result of those sermons. It is, however, important for the church to be aware that the proclamation of the truth carries the potential risk of alienating it from people in other denominations. It goes without saying that the intense emotions at funerals can create a volatile setting for the reception of the sermon.

In evaluating doctrinal sermons at funerals, Titus Matemavi notes that the practice is too confrontational and produces limited results.[1] While it is true that preaching doctrine at funerals could result in some baptisms, it is also true that many people are outraged by the practice. The preacher may either never know about these people or choose to overlook them in assessing the effectiveness of his sermon. Thus, anecdotal evidence of baptisms from such sermons is not the complete account. Those who are outraged or just do not find any value in the message are most likely not going to approach the preacher about it and thus they have not been accurately accounted for.

Another way that Adventists have demonstrated their concern for doctrinal purity

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[1]Titus Matemavi, former East Zimbabwe Conference president, telephone interview by author, January 13, 2004.

at funerals is the vigorous challenge to some practices that arise from the belief in the survival of the spirit. It is easy to see how this leads them to confront some traditional practices. Because of the understanding that rituals betray belief, practices such as taking the corpse around the house to "confuse the spirit" and pausing on the way to the grave to "rest" the deceased are resisted. There have been numerous occasions when church leaders have made public announcements in an attempt to stop the ritual when it was already underway, with or without success. Naturally, these showdowns erode the dignity of the occasion. Such intervention by the church representative is often resented by relatives of the deceased, particularly if they are not members of the church. They perceive it as unjustified meddling in their family affairs. One wonders about the effectiveness and indeed the justification of such interventions directed at the rituals when the practice of the rituals betrays a flawed philosophical understanding of the nature of death. Could such interventions suddenly infuse the correct theology and doctrine? Could they suddenly help anyone find God or perhaps arouse interest to know more about Him? Could they help the bereaved to so appreciate the minister's ministry that they will be ready for his or her post-funeral ministry? It is essential for ministers to critically consider how much good, if any, is achieved by such an approach.

Zebron M. Ncube notes that in African culture the whole community comes together to support the bereaved. Thus, as Adventists participate in funerals they should recognize that there are other sectors of the community that share the forum with them. Adventists should therefore not undertake to make the other participants act like them. Ncube suggests, however, that Adventists should develop the art of negotiation so that

when they are in charge of the funeral service they can seek an amicable solution with the family as well as other entities who may have a stake in the process. He also adds that in the final analysis we should recognize that the only thing the Adventist participant can fully control is the part that he plays. That is the part that they can and should ensure conforms to Adventist belief.[1]

Our regard for the truth is indeed commendable. Christ called Himself the Truth. Our love for the Truth should motivate us to seek to know the truth as taught in the Scriptures. Yet we should always remember that Jesus came first and foremost to save people. Indeed He challenged falsehood, but He also would withhold truth until an opportune time. He was quoted in John 16:12 as saying, "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." If Christ is our model for ministry, we shall learn when and what to speak as we are led and prompted by His Spirit. We shall also learn that there is a time to speak as well as a time to keep silent (Eccl 3:7). We will realize that the proclamation of distinctive doctrines and ministry to the grieving are mandated by the same Lord, but compressing them into the same event when non-Adventists are present is ill-advised. Each of these aspects of ministry should occupy their appropriate domain. Our primary concern, particularly at funerals, should not be, "What is happening to truth?" Uppermost in our minds should be, "How am I ministering and meeting the needs of the mourners?"

Another consideration is the frame of mind of the mourners. Their state of mind is

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[1]Zebron M. Ncube, former president of the Central Zimbabwe Conference, telephone interview by author, February 23, 2004.

not suited to grapple with unfamiliar teaching. Confusion and preoccupation with their loss is paramount. Their immediate need is comfort and hope. Those who do not subscribe to our conditionalist belief are not likely to be convinced during their time of intense grief. When we preach conditionalism at funerals, the people who appreciate the message at that time are primarily those who already understand and believe it. Thus, doctrinal preaching at funerals targets the converted and potentially alienates the rest of the people. It is true that the Christian hope of the resurrection makes the most sense in the context of conditionalism. However, funeral time is not an opportune time to lay the doctrinal foundation; it is a time to foster hope. Wayne E. Oates writes,

> The funeral is primarily for the comfort of the family and for declaring the solidarity of the rest of the community of worshipers with the family in their grief. It is not a time for admonitions about the need of persons to "straighten up and fly right" or to convert them with the threat of death. The primary goal of the funeral is to worship God in the valley of the shadow of death and to care for the mourners.[1]

Nyaradzo: Ministry or Compromise?

A practice known as *nyaradzo* (consolation) has taken root among some Christian churches in Zimbabwe. It is not easy to determine the exact time of its inception, but it is likely that it arose from the desire from some indigenous Christian churches to incorporate some traditional practices into their religion. At least in some indigenous churches and the Roman Catholic church *nyaradzo* (also called *runyaradzo*) has taken

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[1]Wayne E. Oates, *Grief, Transition, and Loss: A Pastor's Practical Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 27.

the form of an improvised substitute for the *kurova guva* ceremony.[1] Daneel describes a *nyaradzo* ceremony that he witnessed. He notes that preachers from the Zionist Christian Church used language that presupposed that they were facilitating the passage of the deceased's spirit to Heaven.[2] The idea that the spirit's passage to another locale or realm needs to be facilitated by the living parallels the underlying belief in *kurova guva.* While there is that similarity in the underlying presuppositions, it should be noted that the church officials grudgingly acquiesced to some activities that were essentially *kurova guva* but would not themselves participate. Later they left the scene while some rituals were going on, perhaps to avoid an embarrassing confrontation.[3] The Catholic Church is much more accommodating to the *kurova guva.* Daneel comments that their approach does not really change the connotation of the traditional rite and results in no confrontation between Christ and the ancestral spirits.[4] One version of the ceremony designed by Father Joseph Kumbirai includes presenting the grain that will be used in ceremonies to the deceased, blessing the beer and the beasts that will be slaughtered, going to the grave and sprinkling holy water onto the sacrificial goat, and involvement in the inheritance ceremony and its attendant rituals with the priest as an active participant.

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[1]M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 117. The *Kurova guva* ceremony is the canonizing ceremony discussed in chapter 3.

[2]Ibid., 130-131.

[3]Ibid., 130-132.

[4]Ibid., 272.

This model has many critics even within Kumbirai's own denomination.[1]

It goes without saying that any attempts to accommodate the belief that the spirit of the deceased is alive or is in transition have no place in the Adventist church. However, as *nyaradzo* has been adopted by other denominations, it has evolved, taking the form of a preaching service at the home of the deceased without any parallels to *kurova guva*. The Adventist church in some places adopted *nyaradzo,* but the practice did not really take root nor was it widespread denominationally. In time, the leadership of the church discouraged *nyaradzo* because of concerns about associations with *kurova guva* and other cultural ceremonies. Pastor E. C. Ushewokunze, who successfully conducted *nyaradzo* in his district before the church began to resist the practice, acknowledges that some members of the church yielded to pressure from the extended family to brew beer and participate in some traditional rituals the night before the *nyaradzo.* This, he adds, led some non-Adventists to disparage the church for sanctioning the rituals. They did not know that the church was only involved in the Sabbath services. The services, as he conducted them, followed the regular church format, other than that they were conducted at the home of the bereaved and focused on consoling the bereaved.[2] The Adventist church is not alone in its resistance to *nyaradzo*. In 1965 the Dutch Reformed Church abolished it because of concerns that their members were turning it into glorified *kurova*

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[1]Ibid., 272- 274.

[2]E. C. Ushewokunze, telephone interview, by author, February 23, 2004.

guva.[1]

Onias Muza tells of *nyaradzo* ceremonies conducted by a non-Adventist church in which the family members present address the deceased in ways that are reminiscent of *kurova guva* rituals. However, he also notes that these utterances were not necessarily a part of the program as organized by the church leaders. Indeed, he adds, that because of affirmations of the immortality of the soul by preachers at these ceremonies, the line between addressing the deceased as an ancestral spirit and as a soul in paradise tended to be blurred.[2]

Muza also describes a tragic time when a group of young people, from another Adventist district, were killed in a road accident. Since they were enroute to his church, Muza initiated a visit by some of his members to the other church. The pastor in that district had misgivings about the propriety of such a visit and objected to it, thinking it might be for *nyaradzo*. Muza explained that he and his members felt that they wanted to share the pain with the other church and since it took time to plan, they had not been able to attend the funerals. He felt that such a visit would be appropriate. The other pastor relented, but took pains to explain to his church that the visit was not a *nyaradzo.* Muza reports that the service seemed to have been well received by the members of the other disrict, despite the host pastor's misgivings.[3] Experiences like this illustrate how wary

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[1]Daneel, 276.

[2]Onias Muza, telephone interview by author, January 25, 2004.

[3]Ibid.

some Adventist church leaders are of *nyaradzo.*

Titus Matemavi, a former president of the East Zimbabwe Conference, describes a number of *nyaradzo* ceremonies that he attended in the 1970s. These were comprised of sermons delivered by preachers from different denominations. He quipped that whenever Adventist preachers participated, they preferred to preach last, so as to counteract any false doctrines that others preached. Matemavi also notes that some Adventist pastors have used *nyaradzo* effectively for evangelism in the Chiduku district of the East Zimbabwe Conference, resulting in baptisms.[1]

The experiences described above demonstrate one reason for differences of opinion concerning the propriety of *nyaradzo.* Many varied activities seem to pass for *nyaradzo.* Thus, even the service that Muza conducted at one church had the pastor concerned that members would think that it may be a *nyaradzo.* I have little doubt that Pastor Ushewokunze would have labeled it as such, because in fact that is how he conducted *nyaradzo* in his district, except that he did it at the homestead of the bereaved. Thus when people debate on this matter they may be critiquing markedly different events. Another problem is that it is difficult to find consensus on the extent to which associations should be considered in condemning a practice. Thus, not everyone agrees that *nyaradzo* should be abolished simply because some think that it reflects or has its roots in the *kurova guva.*

Daneel remarks that *nyaradzo* in independent churches has essential differences from *kurova guva.* He argues that *nyaradzo* typically is conducted, at most, a few months

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[1]Matemavi interview, January 13, 2004.

after the time of death, while *kurova guva* does not take place until at least a year or more has elapsed. He also notes that the moods at the two events are markedly different; the former being mournful because the sense of loss is still keenly felt while the latter is joyful because, on the one hand, bereavement is further in time and, on the other, the deceased is deemed to be reunited with the dead ancestors and also brought back to fellowship with the living.[1]

Titus Matemavi observes that the way that *nyaradzo* is conducted makes it so different from *kurova guva* that the two are different ceremonies. He concedes that the fact that the two come some time after burial might cause some to see a link. He notes, however, that the *kurova guva* filled a need for continued support for the bereaved. Thus it was a coping mechanism that helped the family to revisit the life of the deceased and to reminisce.[2]

Pastor E. C. Ushewokunze noted, in a telephone interview, that indeed many bereaved families are no longer adequately supported due to high incidence of death within the same community. He adds that the cultural practice in which the corpse is kept overnight at the residence is largely abandoned because the community cannot cope with the number of deaths. Burial follows as soon as the body is released from the mortuary and then the community disperses.[3] These abridged funerary procedures leave the

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[1]Daneel, 119.

[2]Matemavi interview, January 13, 2004.

[3]Ushewokunze interview, February 23, 2004.

bereaved, still in the grips of raw emotions, to fend for themselves. The need for the community of faith to linger a little longer is thus intensified because of the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe. At an appropriate time we may return to the bereaved and reminisce together on the life of the deceased.

Irion admonishes against the shortened mourning period. Speaking to American culture, whose mourning period has also grown shorter but for a different reason, he writes:

> There is nothing sacrosanct about three days or seven days or thirty days. It does need to be said, however, that a structured period of mourning is intended to give the person time for confronting the reality of the situation in which he finds himself. The shorter the time allowed for this encounter with reality, the greater the likelihood that the individual will be minimally involved. The tendency to want to get the funeral over with and to return to life as usual as quickly as possible can readily become a part of the mechanism of avoidance.[1]

The rituals of the African funeral, both the good and the bad, structured the mourning period. In Zimbabwe *kurova guva* marked the end of the mourning period, a full year or more after bereavement. When people turn to the Adventist faith, indeed they find that the burden of superstition and fear is rolled away, but at the same time they may also suddenly find themselves without the structure in their time of mourning. Indeed some who are born into the church may not even recognize the loss because they have never participated in the ceremonies.

As Adventists we cannot condone *kurova guva,* despite any benefits it had in helping the bereaved to cope. We should also distance ourselves from any attempt to

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[1]Irion, *The Funeral: Vestige or Value?* 51.

mirror that ceremony in any way because its basic presuppositions are contrary to our fundamental beliefs. However, to deny members an alternative ceremony that absolutely focuses on God and spiritual matters because of the concern about being misunderstood seems to me to be too severe. Would it be justifiable to turn a blind eye to a need because some have filled the same need inappropriately? Would it be tenable to disregard someone's thirst because others tend to quench theirs with the wrong beverage? Likewise, it would not be sound to reject *nyaradzo,* if it is conducted appropriately, just because some have overstepped the line. If, indeed people have a need to revisit the life of the deceased, then perhaps we should employ our resources in finding ways to meet that need appropriately rather than in convincing the people that they have no such need. Further, we would do well to engage with families before and, if possible, as they participate in amoral ceremonies, such as the inheritance rituals so that by proactive guidance we can help them avoid unchristian and unethical practices. Such engagements help to maintain some structure to the mourning period and also give spiritual direction to the participants.

It is my view that the concern for doctrinal purity and clarity, while essential, should never supercede the integrity of ministry. Ministry and doctrinal precision should complement, not contradict or impede, each other in the mission of the church. We should also settle in our minds that nothing we do or avoid doing may completely exonerate us from all suspicion and misunderstanding. Would Jesus have ministered to the city of Sychar if He feared that a prolonged conversation with a woman of questionable morals might taint His reputation (John 4)?

Some within the Christian community in Zimbabwe, Adventists and non-

Adventists, have successfully designed models of *nyaradzo* that do not incorporate veneration of ancestral spirits. Perhaps what Adventists need to do is to accept this initiative and go a step further by finding ways to make the service consistent with Adventist doctrine. One way would be to find a replacement label for *nyaradzo* so that no conceptual baggage is carried over from the "christianized" *kurova guva* ceremonies." Indeed the word *nyaradzo* was an excellent choice because it embraced the purpose of the service. However, as church leaders dialogue on the modalities of such a service they can also search for an appropriate name that also highlights themes such as hope, revival, faith, and courage.

To further remove any association with ancestral veneration the service could be conducted days or weeks, not months, after death has occurred. Indeed the service would be more meaningful closer to the time of death than months later. Members could also be encouraged to avoid a festive atmosphere and if they have to serve food, opt instead for vegetarian food rather than slaughtering an animal. It may seem advisable to avoid visiting the grave site or holding a service there, even though there may be no sin in doing so. "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Cor 6:12). If the congregation has a grief support ministry, one of its functions would be to arrange for such services and integrate them into the regular life of the church. If the high death rate makes individual services unrealistic, then it may be more feasible to hold such a service for a group of bereaved and find a way to focus on each of the deceased and each of the surviving families.

Funerals as Evangelistic Opportunities

Many church members view funerals as evangelistic opportunities. They reason that there are people present at funerals who would not come to any other religious gathering. They see the funeral providing a unique opening to reach these people whom they may never meet again. In addition some members feel that somehow the sorrow and the sense of helplessness predispose the mourners to the acceptance of the gospel.

In practice, Adventist evangelism focuses, to a large extent, on other Christians who already belong to other denominations. As noted earlier in this chapter, many members and leaders perceive the mission of the church as the proclamation of distinctive truths, and evangelism is not complete unless this is accomplished. Many feel that we should not spend too much time preaching the same truths that other denominations already preach. Perhaps this disposition is at least partly responsible for the focus on members of other denominations; persons who have already accepted the Christian message, but not our distinctive truths.

Our special mission to teach the distinctive truths should not, however, impede our ability to comfort the bereaved. We should also not lose the vision that funerals are opportunities for evangelizing. Following bereavement, people usually engage in reflection about their values and reorganization of their lives. This window of opportunity should neither be wasted by focusing only on the temporal needs of the bereaved, nor abused by premature doctrinal teaching. Such teaching reveals insensitivity to the emotional state of the mourners. The attempt to get quick results will likely alienate some people and cause long term-resentment.

Perhaps the problem is that we misjudge the point at which the window of opportunity opens and fail to realize that it stays open for a while following bereavement. The danger is to proceed with the doctrinal teaching prematurely and thus prevent the window from opening at all. A better approach would be to make our ministry at funerals so meaningful and effective that it impacts the lives of the mourners and opens doors. Our ministry at funerals should, thus, become an entering wedge for our message. In ministering to the bereaved we should seek to establish relationships that will afford us future opportunity to share our beliefs. Truth presented without such a relationship often leads to rejection.

Our approach to ministry needs to strike a balance between two extremes. One end of the spectrum is what I may call the entrepreneurial approach in which evangelism is the sole purpose of all deeds of kindness. This view would lead people to view any act of kindness that does not result in conversion as being wasted. Missions of kindness that do not afford us an opportunity to evangelize lose priority and urgency. Efforts and resources that are put into missions of kindness must yield results in opportunities for evangelism and baptisms; if they do not, they are not worthwhile like capital expenditure that produces no profit.

The other end of the spectrum sees acts of kindness as being an end in themselves with no effort to evangelize. This view fails to utilize to the maximum opportunities that acts of kindness provide. Thus this view neglects to find and enter the doors that kindness opens. Such a view fails to see the "vertical" dimension of social welfare work and reduces it to mere humanistic endeavors.

It is not necessary to take one view or the other. Every opportunity to meet a human need must be cherished for what it means in alleviating pain. In alleviating the burdens of the suffering we participate in the same ministry that Christ did. If our ministry comforts the mourners, and does nothing more, it will still be worthwhile. Yet we should not be blind to the doors that open in the process.

Ellen G. White exhorts believers to be involved in "disinterested benevolence." By this she means unselfish acts of kindness done to the needy. She writes,

> I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence.[1]

She prompts believers to follow the example of Jesus. She notes that "His life was without selfish interest, but ever marked with disinterested benevolence."[2] Again she writes, "The Saviour's entire life was characterized by disinterested benevolence and the beauty of holiness. He is our pattern of goodness. From the beginning of His ministry, men began to comprehend more clearly the character of God. "[3]

It is important to note that Ellen G. White's concept of disinterested benevolence

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1947), 191, 192.

[2]Ellen G. White, *Christian Experiences and Teachings of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 174.

[3]Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 262.

included a spiritual component. Hence, the ministry of Christ helped people to comprehend more clearly the character of God. In *The Ministry of Healing* she sheds more light on how Jesus worked. She notes that "Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching."[1] In the same book she says,

> Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me."
>
> There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice.[2]

A double blessing may be bestowed when we minister to people just because it is the right thing to do, and then stand in readiness to share our precious teachings as opportunities are provided. Thus, evangelism continues to be an important objective, but not the sole purpose of our grief ministry. The church should continue to see funerals as opportunities for evangelism. However, evangelism should not be only an event, but a process. Thus when a funeral service is conducted without a doctrinal emphasis, or without a public decision for baptism, it is not a lost opportunity; it could very well be an opportunity in incubation. If we nurture the relationships that we establish through grief ministry in the name of Christ and His church, results will come.

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[1]Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific,1942), 20.

[2]Ibid., 143.

The Relevance of Belief and Faith to Grief Situations

Kenneth J. Doka notes that faith can have both constructive and destructive aspects. While Christianity promises resurrection and reunion, it may also produce fear of retribution and damnation. It offers forgiveness but also exacerbates guilt.[1] Perhaps one reason why faith can have such varied responses among people is that the gospel and the accompanying tenets of the Bible mean different things to different people. To some the focal point of the Christian message is the assurance that because of the death of Jesus, eternal life is granted to those who believe. Others may view Christianity as primarily moral teachings whose requirements they must try to uphold as best as they can and then face the judgment. It is quite clear that one's understanding and interpretation of the Christian message shape one's picture of the image of God and that in turn has an impact upon the grieving process. The perception of God as primarily an exacting judge, constantly measuring us against His requirements, erodes assurance and undermines hope. On the other hand belief in a personal Savior and Lord who is gracious in His dealings with us fosters hope.

Christianity teaches Divine retribution upon the unrepentant, and though this doctrine is not usually highlighted in grief situations, believers may often reflect on it even in their sorrow. In situations where the deceased's commitment to God was doubtful, the survivors have a lingering concern about his or her destiny. In such cases

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[1]Kenneth J. Doka, "The Spiritual Crisis of Bereavement," in *Death and Spirituality,* ed. Kenneth J. Doka with John D. Morgan (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1993), 185.

eschatology may not provide solace for them. The fact that probation has closed for that individual can translate into compounded grief. Doka writes, "Fears related to an afterlife may inhibit a survivor's ability to withdraw emotional energy from the deceased. Here concerns about the ultimate fate of the deceased may inhibit the resolution of grief."[1]

Many Christians believe that rewards and punishments are meted out at death. In their view the destiny of the bereaved is not only sealed; rewards and punishments are already being meted out to the dead. Thus, even at the very time of bereavement and grief, they believe that their loved one, if he or she was a nonbeliever, is suffering retribution. Their belief that punishment for sin is unending torment in hell causes them anguish because they imagine their loved one is caught in relentless pain and suffering. Clearly such a belief does little to console the mourners.

The Adventist belief is that all the dead, believers and nonbelievers, are in a state of lifeless unconsciousness, awaiting their rewards. The punishment for evil-doers is destruction, total extinction, rather than perpetual torment. We should have no illusion that the prospect of the annihilation of a loved one is a consolation in grief, but it is much less excruciating than the alternative. The Adventist teaching, on one hand, affirms a just God, who will by no means clear the guilty, and, on the other hand, upholds a gracious God who compassionately brings to an end the suffering of the wicked. The suffering of the wicked, while real and bitter, is short.

Another advantage of the belief that the dead are unconscious, particularly for Zimbabwe is the eradication of the fear of the spirits. Grief is no longer compounded by

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[1]Ibid., 190.

the fear that the spirit of the deceased is dangerous and may mete punishment for omissions. This gives the bereaved the freedom to plan the funeral and burial in ways that are convenient and meaningful to the survivors.

Along with some groups, Adventists highlight the resurrection as the way to eternal life. This is in contrast to the prevailing view that the soul is immortal and at death escapes the bondage of the body to enjoy paradise. While the teaching of the immortality of the soul is viewed by many as a comfort, we should observe that this view implies that after death has occurred, there is nothing more to look forward to, other than to await the time when the living will also die and then reunite with the deceased. The way to that reunion, according to this view, is more bad news, another death. Without a resurrection, reunion with our dead loved ones will always have the shadow of separation with other loved ones, those who survive us. Clearly, even though death is reckoned to be a reunion, few of the living joyously anticipate their own demise. Further, it is hard to imagine that, if the souls indeed went to paradise at death, the reunited loved ones would be joyful, given the grief that grips the survivors. It seems to me, therefore, that the prospects of reunion without a resurrection are at the very least, marked by ambivalent feelings.

There is another subtle difference between immortality of the soul and resurrection theologies. Resurrection theology speaks of God's intervention while the teaching of the immortality of the soul speaks of the durability of the soul. When people experience the hopelessness and loss of control that comes with a loved one's death, they need to focus more on God's power and ability to intervene in ultimately reversing the situation, rather than to focus on the purported indestructibility of the soul. Mitchell and

Anderson write:

> Making individual survival central, placing all one's hope in "natural" immortality of the soul is sub-Christian. It needs no Christ. It is a belief tied more to the doctrine of creation than that of redemption. The proclamation of the resurrection at death is about the nature of God more than about human survival. The promise of continuity in the face of radical discontinuity of death is grounded in the dependability of God.[1]

Paul E. Irion notes the need for the bereaved to understand death in terms of both continuity and discontinuity.[2] He insists that neither of the two themes should be emphasized at the expense of the other. Thus, the future life should not shadow the fact that today a life has been disrupted, nor should the finality of death dim the hope of the life to come. Irion warns that the resurrection, along with social immortality, could be so presented that discontinuity is diminished to the point of making death an illusion.[3] In another work, Irion speaks of the "tension between continuity and discontinuity that the concept of the resurrection contains."[4] It would appear, from reading these two assertions, that Irion is not entirely consistent. If he speaks of the resurrection as containing these two poles, how can it be possible to use that very teaching to overshadow discontinuity?

What is interesting is that Irion's later statement is preceded by his discussion of

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[1]Mitchell and Anderson, 148. Adventists would not concur that the resurrection occurs at death. Placing the resurrection at death once again makes death to be an ambivalent event because both good and bad are taking place simultaneously.

[2]Paul E. Irion, "The Funeral and the Bereaved," in *Resources for Ministry in Death and Dying,* ed. Larry A. Platt and Roger G. Branch (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 216.

[3]Ibid., 216, 217.

[4]Irion, *The Funeral: Vestige or Value?* 165.

death, the funeral, and resurrection of the whole person.[1] In this discussion Irion endorses M. E. Dahl's concept of "somatic identity" as opposed to "material identity" and "total newness" in the resurrection. Irion's view of the nature of people in life, death, and the resurrection arises from his belief that biblically the soul "is the self, the whole person, the living being."[2] It is this interpretation of the New Testament resurrection (which converges with the Adventist doctrine) that Irion claims contains within itself the themes of continuity and discontinuity. It is clear that, for Irion, the resurrection, rightly interpreted, can help the bereaved to integrate the themes of continuity and discontinuity into their grief experience.

The contrasts between immortality of the soul and the resurrection are niceties that should not be articulated in connection with an immediate grief situation. The teaching of these doctrines would be totally inappropriate at that time. Believers who already hold these beliefs have the theological context in which to grieve with hope. Adventists should, therefore, recognize the comfort we find in these doctrines and share them with others in nonthreatening ways in post-funeral ministry and friendship.

Another dimension in which the Adventist message impacts grief is the Great Controversy motif in which doctrines and events are interpreted. Sullender claims that finding meaning in our losses is part of the resolution of grief.[3] Indeed, the questions "Why?" and "Why me?" cannot be satisfactorily answered either theologically or by the

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[1]Ibid., 150ff.

[2]Ibid., 149, 150.

[3]Sullender, 184, 185.

explanations of witch doctors who cite ritual or other omissions. However, the Great Controversy theme places events into a scheme in which there is meaning and movement to a definite end. We can interpret our misfortunes and hurts as Satan's assaults. We can also be assured that since the conflict is ultimately between God and Satan, God will "in the fullness of time" act decisively against the enemy and in our behalf. The Great Controversy motif also assures us that victory is certain and is already ours.

The Adventist interpretation of eschatology is also pertinent to grief situations. Our understanding of eschatology, which is by no means unique to us, has a time line in which victory is definitive. Life in Paradise is not a nebulous existence, but a real event with a definite commencement at the second advent. Our eschatology not only includes resurrection, a reversal of death, but also the destruction of death, sin, and Satan. Thus our perspective of eschatology includes two climactic events of cosmic proportions, the resurrection and the destruction of sin and death. The resurrection and the eternal life that it encompasses inspire hope. The ultimate destruction of Satan, the wicked, sin, and death brings anticipatory closure in the sense that Satan will face retribution and annihilation as will the human perpetrators of crime.

It is my view that the Christian faith provides a framework in which believers can cope with loss and grief. Christianity provides a community that can afford comfort in addition to, or even in the absence of, familial support. It is also my view that Adventist theology -- in particular the eschatology of man, the state of the dead, and the resurrection -- is not only the more consistent with the Scriptures but also provides the better philosophical background to cope with grief. The Great Controversy motif, on

which we hang many of our tenets, provides a scheme in which human experience has meaning and has some forward movement towards a predictable end.

Having noted the relevance of these beliefs to the grief experience, I should also stress that our beliefs should not be selected on the basis of their supposed advantage or convenience to us. Truth is truth regardless of its ultimate implications. However, we should also remember that God in His love and omniscience has provided for His children the best philosophical framework to meet their deepest needs. The nature of human beings, in life, in death, and in the resurrected life, is not incidental, but it is God ordained. God predetermined this because it is the best for us. His interventions in the destiny of the world, the resurrection, the destruction of the wicked as opposed to perpetual torment, the restoration of the earth, and the annihilation of sin and death speak of God's love and reveal His purposes.

CHAPTER 5

DYNAMICS IN GRIEF MINISTRY

An effective grief ministry program must recognize and utilize three important components. First, it must be motivated and guided by biblical teaching. Second, it must be relevant to the culture of the bereaved. Third, it must recognize the usefulness of the findings of modern research. A pastor, who understands the Divine mandate of grief ministry, takes time to study the dynamics of the grief process, and then applies these insights to the mourner in ways that are culturally relevant, is likely to accomplish much in helping the bereaved persons to resolve their grief.

Cultural considerations for grief ministry in Zimbabwe have already been presented in an earlier chapter. This chapter, first, discusses the call for believers to participate in grief ministry. Second, it will address anticipatory grief and pre-death ministry to the survivors-to-be. Third, it will discuss the phases of grief and other factors that affect grieving. The last two sections will, respectively, discuss temporal and spiritual needs and how to deal with them.

The most practical grief ministry in Zimbabwe will utilize the talent of members. The clergy cannot even begin to address the problem by themselves. As I discuss grief ministry, I assume that the pastor is not doing all the work alone, instead, he or she is

empowering the members and training them to participate in this work. Hence, the terms "pastor" and "minister," in the context of this dissertation, are not restricted to clergy alone. They include surrogates of the clergy person, those who are specifically tasked to perform a function, as well as those who are drawn into grief ministry by default.

The Call to Comfort the Bereaved

In Rom 12:15 Paul calls on believers to "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." The Greek of this passage employs the infinitive mood. Thus, *Young's Literal Translation* renders it "to rejoice with the rejoicing, and to weep with the weeping." Most English versions have a dynamic translation in the imperative mood because that is the intended meaning in the Greek text. In Rom 12 Paul is giving a series of injunctions to the believers. Instead of a repetitious list of imperatives, Paul weaves in participles and infinitives that maintain the same force of command.

The injunctions that Paul makes here follow up the command in Rom 12:1 for believers to present themselves as a living sacrifice. The commands that follow are specific ways in which they would demonstrate their dedication to God. Because of their dedication to God, they become committed to His community or His household.[1] The believer has therefore become a part of the body of Christ as indicated in vss. 4 and 5 . As a part of the body of Christ the believer exists in an organic relationship with the rest of the church. The analogy of the body implies a systemic interaction between the members. The joys as well as the troubles of one member find their way to the hearts of the others.

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[1]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 649.

Consequently, members rejoice with one who has a cause to rejoice and grieve when one is afflicted.

When members understand the nature of their relationship to fellow believers, weeping with those who weep is not going to be just a formality or an attempt to meet social expectations by participating in rituals or attending a funeral. There is to be a purposeful effort to participate in a way that brings healing to the bereaved. Attending funerals and visiting the bereaved should not be an exercise of social correctness nor is it a way to pay social dues to be reaped in time of need. Their participation is a ministry to a member of the body of Christ to which they also belong.

In 1 Thess 4:13-18 Paul stresses the certainty of the resurrection based on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. In vs. 18 he concludes by enjoining believers to comfort one another with these words or messages. The purpose of his teaching about the certainty of the resurrection was for the comforting of the believers. It is interesting that Paul implies that the comforting of believers comes from other believers. The believers are to comfort *one another*. Thus comfort does not come from a mere intellectual understanding of the truth about the resurrection. If this were the case perhaps it would have sufficed for Paul to urge believers to study this teaching diligently particularly when faced with bereavement. Instead, Paul calls on believers to use the message of the resurrection to comfort others. Paul's instruction here means more than theological instruction on eschatology as a way to comfort the bereaved. The injunction implies that believers will become personally involved in the comforting of other believers. As they personally engage with the grieving they have a wealth of resources in the teaching of the

resurrection that they can use in this ministry.

It is also noteworthy that the comforting is a reciprocal exercise (*parakaleite allelous*). Believers are instructed to comfort one another. There is not one category of believers that is charged to comfort the rest. The fact that the believers are exhorted to comfort one another suggests that it is every believer's responsibility to comfort the others in his or her circle of influence who need to be comforted. Thus while the clergy may have a special pastoral responsibility to the grieving, the rest of the believers are not released from this obligation. The pastor should recognize the resources available to him or her in the membership of the church and tap them. If members of the church participate meaningfully in comforting the bereaved, beyond the funeral service, grief ministry will not take a disproportionate amount of the pastor's time and yet this aspect of the work will not be neglected.

Paul begins his second letter to the Corinthians by praising God, "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3). God is here characterized by His "mercies" (*oiktirmos*). The picture is that God has "bowels" of compassion that are moved in response to the distress of His children.[1] Paul also characterizes God by the comfort (*parakleseos*) that He provides. Thus He is pictured as one who stands by those who are in need.[2] Robertson notes that the word "comfort" derives from the Latin

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[1]A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament* (n.p.: Broadman, 1934), s.v. "2 Corinthians 1:3."

[2]Ibid.

confortis which signifies braving something together.[1] As God "braved" our afflictions with us, so in comforting others we brave their afflictions with them. Our role is to be with them in their sorrow even when we may not be able to give instant solutions to their situation. A caring presence with the griever is the primary way to bring comfort. We may have no theological answers for their pain and questions, yet a ministering presence is part of the process that brings resolution to their grief.

The concept of braving afflictions with another also suggests that those who comfort others do not necessarily attempt to help them to by-pass their grief. The healthiest way to grief resolution is through it. Thus, comforters will recognize not only the legitimacy of grieving, but the benefits that will accrue to those who confront it squarely. Comforting is, therefore, a ministry of presence that alleviates, but does not eliminate grief.

In 2 Cor 1:4, Paul indicates that the comfort of God is for our benefit in all our tribulation. Believers are thus exhorted to call on God in their time of difficulty. Paul goes on to suggest that the purpose or end of God's ministry of comfort to the believers is to enable them to comfort others in every kind of affliction. The picture that emerges here is a replication of comfort. The believer reproduces to others the ministry that he or she received. Robertson suggests that the purpose of affliction is to equip believers for the ministry of comforting others.[2] Instead of placing emphasis on affliction as the equipping

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Robertson, s.v. "2 Corinthians 1:4."

process, we should see the ministry of comfort accomplishing this purpose. Thus, it is the comfort that we receive when we are in affliction, not just the affliction itself, that obligates and equips us to comfort others. Robertson further states that to serve without this qualification "will be professional and perfunctory. . . . Personal experience of God's comfort is necessary before we can pass it on to others."[1]

We should not conclude, from these statements, that those who have not been afflicted, and therefore have not been comforted, have no part in grief ministry. Rather, we should see that those who have been comforted are better positioned to be effective in helping others. Their ministry is seasoned with understanding. The ministry to which they were once the object, they can now actively impart to others.

While Paul's discussion here is not specifically in the context of bereavement, the principle must be applied in that situation as well. Those who have gone through loss are best suited to comfort other bereaved. Thus, it makes sense to establish support groups for believers to "comfort one another." In this setting those who have been bereaved in the past and who have personally experienced consolation can in turn support and help those who have currently suffered loss.

An effective bereavement support ministry will regenerate itself. By providing a comforting ministry the pastor begins the process of equipping the members for service. In Zimbabwe this approach would be especially relevant. The low pastor-to-member

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[1]Ibid.

ratio[1] has always necessitated that the members shoulder some pastoral responsibilities and that situation will continue. Pastors cannot cope with all the grief-ministry needs of their members, particularly as they are now faced with the ever escalating death rate. The large number of grieving members would also mean that each local community would have enough people to form functional support groups. If an opportunity for ministry is afforded to the large numbers of members at different stages of grief recovery, the pastor would have a larger pool from which to draw a grief support team. It would also be possible for those members who do not wish to stay permanently in grief-recovery ministry to be rotated out and to be replaced by other members. Grief ministry does not have to be a permanent office to a select group. Participation in the support group at any stage of grief should be voluntary. Likewise, ministry by those who have recovered from grief should be voluntary. Because of the emotional toll that comes from personal investment in the sorrows of others, it may not be a lifelong vocation for any one person.

By participating in grief support groups, grieving members will benefit from the support of fellow mourners. The bereaved can "brave together" the losses they have suffered. They can also become aware of how others in similar situations have coped with or handled their pain. As they recover they will have the added benefit that comes from an awareness that they are constructively engaged in helping others who have suffered a similar pain. Survivors often benefit from engaging in a ministry or a mission that is in some way related to their loss. Support groups, therefore, help the grieving, start the

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[1]Based on the latest statistics a district pastor has an average of 2,858 members under his or her care. See e-mail correspondence from D. Mutanga, the Secretary of the East Zimbabwe Conference, in Appendix D.

process of equipping them to help others, and provide opportunities for service.

Anticipatory Grief and Pre-death Ministry

Because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe, many deaths are described in the local media as resulting from "a long illness." This euphemism is an accurate description of the prevalent dying process in the region. The extended time of illness means that for many people, bereavement is preceded by anticipatory grief.

Aldrich defines anticipatory grief as "any grief occurring prior to a loss, as distinguished from the grief which occurs at or after the loss."[1] In the context of bereavement, it is the sorrow that one experiences with the realization of impending death. It is the process in which a person goes through all the phases of grief in advance of the actual loss.[2] Both the dying and the survivors-to-be experience anticipatory grief, each from his or her own perspectives. Because of the focus of this dissertation, only the anticipatory grief of the survivors-to-be will be discussed.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, in her book *On Death and Dying,* outlines five stages that characterize the reaction of terminally ill patients to the realization that death is inescapable and often imminent. She describes the terminally ill patient going through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally accepting his or her fate.[3] While Kübler-

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[1]C. Knight Aldrich, "Some Dynamics of Anticipatory Grief," in *Anticipatory Grief,* ed. Bernard Schoenberg et al. (New York: Columbia University, 1974), 4.

[2]Wayne E. Oates, *Pastoral Care and Counseling in Grief and Separation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 12.

[3]Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: MacMillan, 1969).

Ross's analysis is a result of her observation of the dying patient's reaction, it is also instructive to the study of anticipatory grief as experienced by survivors-to-be, because the processes are related and comparable.

Anticipatory grief has been viewed as a "rehearsal" of the grief to come by providing the survivors the occasion to partially work through the emotions associated with grief. The delay in the coming of the actual grief-producing event helps to soften the impact of the emotional trauma associated with bereavement. Thus anticipatory grief can be viewed as having some natural adaptive value.[1] This benefit of anticipatory grief does not trivialize the anguish that the family experiences. Anticipatory grief is real grief caused by a loss that is approaching.

In helping the family to deal with anticipatory grief it is important to understand that no two people will experience it in exactly the same way. Paying attention to a framework of phases, such as Kübler-Ross's, helps to provide a structure to work with. The minister will need to listen attentively to the person who is grieving to get cues on where they are in the grieving process and what their needs would be. The minister may also anticipate some emotions that the family is likely to face. He or she may discuss these emotions with the family and in so doing indicate to them that these emotions are normal and it is acceptable to appropriately express them.

Kübler-Ross and others note that the denial phase acts as a buffer in the face of shocking news and it allows people the time to collect themselves and mobilize less

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[1]Irwin Gerber, "Anticipatory Bereavement," in *Anticipatory Grief,* ed. Bernard Schoenberg et al, (New York: Columbia University, 1974), 26, 27.

radical defenses.[1] The family may need the space to deny but as the reality of the situation makes itself evident they will often acknowledge that their loved one is dying. The minister should not be in a hurry to have the family pass the denial stage. He or she should allow them to linger for a while in this phase if they choose to. Attempts to get a second opinion on the diagnosis and prognosis should therefore not be hindered. However, the minister will gradually need to help the family to open up and express how the news impacts them. He or she should encourage them to make use of any medical follow-up that may be needed to alleviate the symptoms and possibly to prolong life.[2]

Anger is a normal reaction in anticipatory grief. In cases that result from HIV infection there is a greater potential for feelings of anger since the transmission of the virus is from person to person. It is deemed to be almost completely preventable and its transmission immediately raises questions of culpability. Thus, when anyone succumbs to AIDS, one of the first impulses among the family and loved ones is to determine who is to blame. It is not hard to see how feelings of anger can fester, particularly if the family believes that the dying person is a victim of another person's illicit behavior. On the other hand, if the dying person's illness is viewed to have resulted from his or her own reckless behavior, the anger may be directed at him or her for self-inflicted sickness, for possibly transmitting it to others, and for the disruption it causes to the family. However, because of the dying person's vulnerable state it is often deemed inappropriate to express anger toward him or her. Because the survivors-to-be are aware of their own feelings of anger

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[1]Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying,* 39.

[2]Oates, *Pastoral Care and Counseling in Grief and Separation,* 16, 17.

this can cause them to have ambivalent feelings. While the survivors-to-be love the patient and are grieved by the prospect of his or her death, they are also upset because they are caught in this situation needlessly. Such ambivalent feelings may fuel guilt and complicate the grieving process. Anger may also be directed toward God who is viewed as able to have prevented this from happening, toward hospital personnel who may be perceived as negligent, or others who may rationally or irrationally be deemed to have caused the illness.

It is important for the minister to recognize and communicate the normalcy of anger in grief situations.[1] He or she will also need to depict to the family a picture of a God who is big enough to allow us to have questions. The minister can use Job's complaints, David's laments, Habakkuk's questions, and other instances from Scripture as examples of God-fearing individuals who had questions and expressed their complaints to God. If the minister alerts the family early on about feelings of anger, they may be proactive in keeping their interactions rational. Any who become targets of anger may better understand the dynamics at play. In encouraging the family to recognize and accept their anger it may be necessary to use expressions that are acceptable such as "annoyed," "irritated," or "bothered." The word "anger" may be emotionally charged and therefore some individuals will find it hard to admit to it.[2]

There are some family conflicts that the pastor should make an effort to help

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[1]Therese A. Rando, ed. *Loss and Anticipatory Grief* (Lexington, MA: Lexington, 1986), 110.

[2]Ibid., 111.

resolve before death occurs to prevent complications afterwards. In some extreme cases the family of a deceased person has conspired to refuse to bury the dead or to participate or even attend the funeral until a conflict has been resolved. They may even decide to take the corpse to the home of the suspected offender and leave it there. This is usually done to demonstrate extreme anger, to pressure someone to comply with some demands, and to cause emotional pain. The practice is usually associated with suspected foul play, wife abuse, or in cases when young women die after elopement but before the man has formalized the marriage. In a society that deems it is necessary to afford the deceased a proper burial lest you provoke the spirits, the refusal to cooperate in burial exerts extreme psychological torture. It is conceivable that AIDS deaths could arouse such bitterness.

If the pastor learns that such complications could be encountered, he or she should seek to have the matter resolved as much as possible before death occurs. If the blame is well placed, then the offending person does well to own up and make restitution if it is possible and required.[1] The pastor should also help the offended party to use sober judgment and to understand that extreme actions are not only futile but can complicate grief for all concerned. He or she can also help them to understand that forgiveness is a crucial step towards grief recovery.

In the bargaining phase, the family tends to review past conflicts in the light of the new situation. Thus, interactions which were perfectly appropriate when they were done

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[1]An example of restitution is the payment of outstanding *roora* (dowry).

in the past are now deemed too severe or insensitive now that the other person is terminally ill. For instance, parents may replay confrontations that they had with a now sick child and chide themselves about it. They repent for their shortcomings, real or perceived, and they resolve to make amends. It may be necessary for the minister to help to reassure the family that their past interactions were healthy and perfectly valid, if that was the case.

The minister will recognize that this phase is possibly an opportunity for people to make a commitment to a relationship with God or to others.[1] In the case where genuine injustices were committed, reconciliation should be encouraged since it helps with the relationship now and will help to alleviate complications in post-bereavement grief. This is also a good time to help the family to recognize the importance of the present time and how it can be used to make the most of the balance of the patient's life. The family could be helped to focus on how to make the patient as comfortable as possible and also determine how to delay the progress of the illness. The minister could also help them to understand that their interaction with the patient and with one another is a process that can foster good memories.

The family, like the dying patient, will have times when they are depressed. At these times the minister should resist the temptation to give unrealistic assurances and false hopes. This is a time to support them by being present and by encouraging them to express their sorrow. Prayer, particularly at this time, will help the family to focus on a transcendent Father who is present with them in sorrow and will in His time lift them to

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[1]Oates, *Pastoral Care and Counseling in Grief and Separation*, 16, 17.

higher ground.[1]

A time may come when it is obvious that the end is near. The family may need to have some time alone with the patient. In situations where there is a large volume of visitors wanting to see the patient, the minister is often the right person to suggest to the family the need for this time alone. The minister can help at this time to regulate visits so that the family continues to have the support of other people and yet has time to themselves.[2]

During anticipatory grief the family is torn between conflicting concerns. While on the one hand the dying person requires more and more care, making ever increasing demands on the time and finances of the family, the survivors-to-be continue to have the need to care for themselves and the rest of the family. Thus those members of the family who are involved in caring for the sick have conflicting demands on their time. They may feel guilty and ashamed to leave the sick to attend to their own needs or to use financial resources to meet other needs.[3] When the minister becomes aware of this difficulty, he or she should communicate the legitimacy of self-care and attending to personal and family needs and guide those involved to make prudent decisions. It is not necessary to deplete resources unproductively, yet it would also be cruel to deny the dying palliative care or medical attention that potentially prolongs life significantly. The minister may also try to

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]David Barton, "The Family of the Dying Person," in *Dying and Death: A Clinical Guide for Care Givers,* ed. David Barton (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1977), 66, 67.

communicate the value of respite by engaging the service of others so that the care-giver comes back refreshed and revitalized resulting in more effective care.

Another form of conflict that survivors-to-be experience is the tension between clinging to the dying person and beginning to let go. The pain of grief has been described as the process of withdrawing emotional energy from a cherished object and reinvesting it into a new relationship.[1] The prospect of bereavement leads the survivor-to-be to begin to imagine the future without the dying and to begin to let go of the dreams and hopes that they had for the patient's future. Yet the love for the person persists and may be heightened because of the vulnerable state of the patient and the additional personal involvement with him or her.[2]

Another conflict that the family grapples with is the need to maintain their customary relationship with the dying person, while the person's situation may be changing. The patient's need for autonomy and control is complicated by increasing dependence.[3] The dying person may no longer be able to fulfill his or her role because of illness. The person, though dying, still has a need to feel that he or she is regarded as a person by the family. As much as possible they should be allowed to participate in the daily life of the family. Their opinion should be sought, as much as is practical.[4]

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[1]Rando, 49.

[2]Ibid., 13.

[3]Ibid., 101.

[4]In some regions in Zimbabwe the sick should still be formally consulted (*kusumwa)* regarding important developments in the family particularly if they are heads of households or have the social or cultural standing that requires it.

Anticipatory grief is real grief. It is not grief that has not yet come; rather it is grief that is felt now because of loss that is anticipated. Thus, those going through it need support just as those who are in post-death bereavement. The minister who understands anticipatory grief can help members as they go through this phase. He or she will "give them permission" to experience and to appropriately express emotions associated with anticipatory grief. The minister will also counsel the survivors-to-be in providing optimum care to the sick person and in so doing may preempt feelings of guilt.

The Stages of Grieving and How to Address Them

Grief is a common experience to humanity, but to each griever it brings a unique package of emotions. Even members of the same family who have experienced the same loss do not necessarily have the same grief experience since their relationship to the deceased is unique. Because grief is such a dynamic experience there is no one accurate way to define or describe grief. The process of grief itself varies with circumstances and from one individual to another. Grief, therefore, is a set of emotions, uniquely packaged for the individual and the circumstances, but it does have predominant and recurring emotions that tend to characterize it.

Indeed all loss experiences result in feelings of grief, but different losses impact us differently. The death of a child, a friend, parent, and a sibling will produce different emotions in the survivors. Likewise death during the prime of life touches survivors differently from death in old age. Murders, tragedies, and suicides bring additional complications that are not experienced following a death from natural causes. Sudden

deaths and death after a lingering illness are different, each with its own set of potential complications. Thus, when encountering a grieving person, it may not be obvious from the onset to know accurately what he or she is experiencing at that time.

Researchers have suggested different schemes to characterize the phases of grief. The schemes they proffer are attempts to chart the process of grieving as it is expected to unfold. These schemes provide a framework to work with in ministering to the grieving, yet we should recognize that grief by its very nature is chaotic and defies systematization. While the schemes are only a framework, they are a starting point. Despite the fact that grieving in real life cannot be distilled into phases, it is far better to work with the framework than to work with no structure at all.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's scheme has been adopted to bereavement settings. While this is a useful scheme, it should be noted that it was originally applied to terminal illness and not to bereavement. Indeed, there are stages in her scheme that are useful in examining grief in bereavement, yet the others do not make a neat fit. It seems to me that denial, per se, in bereavement is short lived. Indeed, the newly bereaved may have a hard time coming to terms with news of death, and they may have a hard time getting used to the reality of the situation. Yet in bereavement the facts are obvious and readily verifiable, unlike the diagnosis of a terminal illness which may take time to verify thereby prolonging denial. Likewise, bargaining as it relates to terminal illness cannot be applied in bereavement due to the generally accepted finality of death. Kübler-Ross's scheme indeed has some usefulness but needs adaptation.

It is important, though, that we recognize the fluid nature of the phases of grief.

There are no clean-cut transitions from one stage to another. The grieving process may consist of varying degrees of any or all the stages throughout. The stages may not be sequential in real life. There may also be a reversion to a phase that was experienced before, while some phases may never substantially manifest themselves.

In *The Courage to Grieve,* Judy Tatelbaum suggests three phases in the grieving process, shock or numbness, suffering and disorganization, and reorganization. During the initial shock the bereaved find it hard to believe the news of death. Their experiences are blurred or hazy. In this state the bereaved are suspended in a state of unreality, only vaguely aware of what is going on around them. Some of their pain is shut off, as if they are anesthetized.[1] Tatelbaum suggests that numbness is beneficial to keep people going and to help them cope with the many details that need attention in the early stages of grief.[2]

Sanders, in describing the shock phase in her own scheme, notes its benefits during the onset of grief. She writes:

> The shock phase is adaptive in that it forms an insulation against the chaotic outside world. This insulation does not mean, however, that pain is not there -- far from it. Yet much of the agony of loss is postponed until the bereaved can begin to cognitively process the event of the death or loss itself. Shock can last from a few minutes to many days, but it usually passes into the next phase of grief when the rituals of death are over and the emotions that have been constricted so tightly begin to release and overflow. At this time, an awareness of a variety of emotions erupt, sometimes with frightening violence. The second phase of grief has

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[1]Tatelbaum, 26.

[2]Ibid.

begun.[1]

While the period of numbness provides a buffer to bereavement, its attendant confusion tends to cloud judgment at a time when many issues concerning the funeral and other related matters have to be decided. The culture in Zimbabwean society has a built-in mechanism in the extended family and clearly defined roles at such times. It would be worthwhile for congregations in Zimbabwe to have a working framework in which the different office holders, such as elders, deacons, women's ministries department, and others, had roles to play when someone suffers a loss. The purpose of such a framework would not be to replace the traditional structure where it is present and relevant, but to supplement it where necessary. Such a framework would also provide support in instances where a member is not afforded support by the traditional framework due to differences in religious persuasions. Such a framework would be an added support system and provide a semblance of familial support to the bereaved.

Tatelbaum notes that the *suffering and disorganization* is the most painful and the longest phase of grieving, sometimes lasting up to several months. This is the time when people begin to feel the full impact of the loss and the emotions that accompany loss seem to be overwhelming and overpowering.[2] The grieving person's daily activities are usually affected. Insomnia and eating disorders are common at this time. Sexuality is also affected by grief. There may be diminished or total loss of interest in sex. On the other

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[1]Catherine M. Sanders, *Grief: The Mourning After* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 60.

[2]Tatelbaum, 28.

hand there may also be an intensification of sexual needs. The disparity of sexual needs at this time may be a cause of confusion and frustration for the individual and may cause some strain in the relationship of a couple.[1] During this time the mourner feels needy, depleted, and unprepared to cope. These feelings, she suggests, result in diminished self-esteem. [2] The emotional turmoil that the person experiences may result in the loss of the desire to live or even suicidal thoughts.[3]

Other emotions associated with this phase are guilt and anger.[4] These emotions perhaps arise from our need to place blame on someone for the loss that we experience. In guilt the blame is placed on oneself, perhaps as a parent wonders what they did wrong that they failed to prevent this loss. In anger, blame is placed on another justly or unjustly. The object of anger may be another person, God, or even the deceased.

During the suffering phase the greatest need for the bereaved is companionship. As they go through the raw emotions of bereavement they need someone to listen to them express their feelings.[5] The first step dealing with these emotions is to acknowledge them. Expressing our feelings aloud to another person will further help us to confront them. It is ironic that in the current circumstances in Zimbabwe the growing tendency is for

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[1]Ibid., 30-33.

[2]Ibid., 29.

[3]Ibid., 30.

[4]Ibid., 28ff.

[5]Ibid., 29, 36-37.

mourners to be abandoned shortly after the funeral, when they are likely to be getting out of the numbness and going into the suffering and disorganization phase. Because of the eroding cultural support, the bereaved are abandoned at the time when they need companionship the most. It is a time when they may need to make important decisions, such as for the welfare of children. Yet decision-making is compounded by depression and apathy. At this time the presence of a trusted friend would be an invaluable support. The friend may counsel with the bereaved to put off important decisions or if necessary to make interim decisions that may be revised later on. It is important for the bereaved to find the companionship and support they need, at least, from their fellow believers, even when familial support may be truncated.

The church in Zimbabwe needs to fill the void that is left by changing customs. The church could provide companionship to the bereaved by establishing grief support groups at congregational and/or district levels. These groups could have formal meetings as well as less structured get-together occasions. The individual members could be encouraged to visit with one another and in so doing minister to each other. Lewis R. Aiken recognizes the value of social support provided by small groups of people who have shared a common loss.[1] In these groups the people would discuss and compare their experiences. Support groups help to validate the feelings of the bereaved. Members of the group would also learn from one another how to cope with some of their experiences. In the support groups the participants would be encouraged to begin to focus on the

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[1]Lewis R. Aiken, *Dying, Death and Bereavement* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 253.

future. They would be encouraged to find ways to reinvest their lives to causes that are in keeping with their loss. Reinvesting one's life in a cause helps to bring structure into one's future and it gives a sense of control at a time when feelings of helplessness are strong. The hope of the resurrection would be another way that they would focus on the future. Eternal life is the ultimate future that God has prepared for us. By focusing on the resurrection, the bereaved can have hope when hopelessness seems overwhelming.

The reorganization phase, like the rest of the grief process, will vary from person to person. It is, however, a time when we begin to "let go" of the deceased. The need to talk about our loss is lessened. "The loss is no less real, but our sense of impoverishment is abating."[1]

In the reorganization phase there is a restoration of activities, such as sleep and eating, to normal patterns. There is also a resumption of active social life as the deceased is no longer the primary focus of life.[2] Tatelbaum cautions that even though the bereaved may feel more energy and presume that they are fully recovered, there may be times when events such as anniversaries will trigger a flashback and cause painful emotions.[3] For many Zimbabweans (certainly not all), the anniversary as a calender date is by far surpassed in significance by events that are associated with the deceased. This is consistent with the African concept of time as event oriented more than a movement of

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[1]Tatelbaum, 46.

[2]Ibid., 45.

[3]Ibid., 46.

the clock or a calender.[1] Events in which the deceased would have had a role to play could bring painful emotions to the survivors.[2]

Tatelbaum likens grief recovery to a love song that has ceased to play but the melody still rings in the ear. The intense feelings gradually diminish and the pain recedes, but the loss is not forgotten.[3] The bereaved begin to focus on the future and channel their energy in that direction. They may feel the urgency to fill the gap that was made by the loss, making it harder to "just sit around."[4]

In a chapter entitled "Finishing," Tatelbaum discusses the need to completely let go of our loved one. She notes that "finishing" does not erase the love or memories of the loved one, but it is an acceptance of the death, an acknowledgment that pain has lessened, and a realization that we are free to reinvest in our lives. She takes the concept from Gestalt therapy and suggests that if we do not finish with our grief we expose ourselves to emotional problems. She notes that we finish our grieving by experiencing or expressing directly our emotions with the goal of moving them from the foreground to the

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[1]John S. Mbiti, 19.

[2]In an interview on September 19, 2003, Cuthbert Machamire reported the case of a widower who had remarried and seemed to have recovered from grief but on his son's wedding day broke down uncontrollably because his deceased wife could not be part of this significant event. I can also testify that in my own experience I hardly ever remember the anniversary of my mother's death. However, the first few camp meetings I attended after her death reminded me that there was someone special who was not in the crowd. The times I attended my childhood home church after her death, I felt an intense longing for her presence.

[3]Tatelbaum, 94.

[4]Ibid., 45.

background.[1]

The technique that she suggests, addressing the deceased and engaging him or her in a dialogue, may be effective in helping people to face their unresolved emotions, but I would not recommend it for use because of our teaching on the state of the dead. Talking to the deceased is suggestive of communicating with the dead. The line between this technique and consulting spirits would be too blurred. Some people would interpret this as a form of communicating with the dead. If the church encouraged such a practice it would send the wrong message. The practice would definitely meet stiff resistance from much of the membership of the Adventist church.

It is better to encourage the grieving person to confront grief by expressing his or her feelings to another living person. This could be a friend, a clergy person, or some other professional -- anyone who is a good listener. Another way would be to encourage the person to write out their feelings. Expressing emotions should certainly be encouraged, but it would be ill-advised to employ a technique that involves talking to the deceased.

Because mourners are focusing on the future and are reinvesting their lives during this phase, this is a good time to encourage them to minister to others who are grieving. They have benefitted from the ministry of others; now they too can bless others. Christ "comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:4). This is the time when the bereaved may turn their tragic experience into a growth

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[1]Ibid., 107.

experience. Perhaps they have already taken steps to have something good come out of their loss by establishing some kind of memorial or becoming involved in a cause that is related to their loss. Such endeavors are healthy and purposeful reactions to loss and they help to counteract helplessness and a "victim mentality." Participation in a grief recovery program to help others is an inexpensive way to give back to the community of believers and to establish a semblance of an ecosystem.

As the mourners begin to reorganize their lives, the pastor should recruit them into the grief recovery program and provide the necessary training. They have already observed how others have helped them in support groups and in visitations. That does not necessarily mean that they are prepared. The pastor will still need to give instructions on how to lead out in groups and how to minister effectively when visiting grieving people. As with many other forms of ministry, it will be best to teach by providing opportunities for observation, role play, and participation with the assistance of someone who has prior experience.

Temporal Needs and How to Assist

The temporal needs of the bereaved are many and varied, depending on the circumstances of the bereavement. Even when the circumstances are similar, individual differences will make each person's set of needs unique. Needs may also shift with the passage of time. Tatelbaum notes that during the initial shock, practical help is needed and as the suffering period of grief comes in, more emotional support is needed.[1]

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[1]Ibid., 74.

While it is helpful to ask oneself, "What would I need if I was in this situation?" it is also essential to remember that it is the needs of the bereaved that we seek to meet at this time. What the minister perceives as needs may not be identical to the needs of the person he or she is ministering to.[1] The minister may find it helpful to take their cues from the grieving people or to ask them. The grieving person is likely to open up and express their needs if the inquirer has demonstrated that he or she, indeed, would like to help and not asking just to fulfill a formality. A general "If there is anything I can do, let me know" does not, by itself, suffice to communicate willingness to help. If it is said in the context of specific needs or as a follow-up to help which has already been rendered, it can be taken more seriously. Other helpful ways of learning the needs of the grieving person are questions like "Would you like such and such?" or "How can I help?"

Because of the prevailing economic conditions in Zimbabwe, a common need for the bereaved is material assistance. The expenses that are associated with funerals are so burdensome that the number of pauper burials is on the rise. This situation has been exacerbated by recurring deaths. While it is common for people who come to comfort the mourners to bring some assistance, usually money, the amount is such that it is a mere token and does not go far enough to defray expenses. If the circumstances of the bereaved are such that they would need financial or material assistance, the local church should, as much as feasible, assist and encourage its members to do so. Often help can be rendered

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[1]My wife and I had firsthand experience in this at a time when we were grieving a loss and some health-care professionals tried to go out of their way to engage us in a conversation. They seemed to make a studious effort to be jovial so as to cheer us up. We recognized their noble intention and appreciated the effort but we were thankful when they left so that we could have some quiet time that we had needed all along.

without excessively depleting resources. Instead of providing money to hire a hearse, a member could offer the use of an appropriate vehicle. Giving in kind, rather than money, can be an efficient way to assist.[1]

In addition to material assistance, it is important for pastors to teach members that they should not spend lavishly on funerals. They should have due regard for the welfare of survivors. The impulse to provide ornate funerary paraphernalia belies our belief on the state of the dead. If church members are encouraged to do more for their living or even dying relatives they would feel less pressured by guilt to be lavish at funerals. Members should also be encouraged to reclaim from the funeral directors as many services as possible so as to cut down on expenses and also to be personally involved in the funeral and burial of their loved one.

In an earlier chapter I mentioned the possibility that cremation, which is not a part of the culture today, may become a consideration in the future. As the Zimbabwean society continues to be hard hit by AIDS and economic woes, cremation may be a less expensive option to dispose of the body than burial. Financial desperation is already demonstrated by the fact that government agencies are becoming involved in "pauper funerals" of unclaimed corpses.

The church should not actively advocate cremation as this may be insensitive to the culture. However, when society begins to consider cremation, the church can clarify

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[1]Ruya Adventist Secondary School often provided simple coffins, made of timber remnants and old, disused doors, covered with an inexpensive black cloth, to needy families in the community. Expenditure was minimal, yet those who received these coffins expressed deep appreciation for them.

to members that there are no theological prohibitions against it. Resurrection will not be hindered by the fact that the body was cremated. Burial and cremation both result in the disintegration of the body and at the resurrection a new one will be furnished. The church should, however, alert the members that the dynamics of grief may be affected by the fact that there is no body at the funeral and that some members of the family may be horrified at the idea of "burning" their loved one. These concerns should not be taken lightly but they are not the only considerations to be made.

A family in bereavement will need relief from performing some tasks associated with the bereavement and other day-to-day chores, as well as relief from expectations of others. Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson refer to this mode of caring as intervention. This involves stepping in to help manage some situations for them and stepping out when the need has passed.[1] The assistance could be tasks that are ordinarily simple but which the bereaved find hard or inconvenient to accomplish because of their state of mind and depleted energy.[2] They may need relief from tasks like driving or assistance in conveying the death message to others. Intervention might also entail helping the bereaved to make or defer important decisions.[3]

Tatelbaum suggests that a bereaved family could benefit from a spokesperson or

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[1]Mitchell and Anderson, 112.

[2]Tatelbaum, 74, 75.

[3]Ibid., 75.

an intermediary who can act as a confidant and handle interferences.[1] A spokesperson for the family could communicate the family's need for quiet time if the family so wishes,[2] an awkward request for a Zimbabwean family themselves to make.

In Zimbabwe, at funerals, it is the general practice to have someone outside the immediate family oversee and coordinate what happens at funerals. It would be helpful if these "superintendents" could take into account the needs of the family and reflect those needs as they make decisions on what goes on, particularly during the time surrounding the funeral. A "superintendent" should purposefully find out the needs of the family and conduct proceedings with these needs in mind. In structuring the program he may take into account the family's need for rest, quiet time, their financial situation, and preferences. In the event that the "superintendent" is not aware of these needs, a friend to the family can help to bridge the gap and act as a spokesperson for the family to the "superintendent."

In the final analysis the needs of the bereaved should dictate what is done and how. This may necessitate a departure from the usual routine. It may also necessitate for both the bereaved and those who come to console them to rid themselves of the notion that to truly show grief or sympathy you have to endure additional hardships. Reduced

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[1]Ibid., 75.

[2]Roger Branch and Larry A. Platt, "The Funeral and Ministry," in *Resources for Ministry in Death and Dying,* ed. Larry A. Platt and Roger G. Branch (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 187. I remember a friend who had lost a child and those who came to support spent the night at the house. My friend's need was rest but it was not possible with so many people around, many singing through the night. I eventually decided to "smuggle" him away and had him spend the night elsewhere and brought him back early in the morning.

sleep time, hunger, discomfort, or unnecessary expenses do not themselves alleviate grief nor do they enrich condolences. I have no doubt that some members have gone through the inconvenience of spending a night at the bereaved's house while the bereaved themselves are at the same time inconvenienced because of their need to rest and to be alone. Each endures the discomforts that benefit nobody simply because of a perceived social expectation.

Another need of those grieving is the support of other people who facilitate the verbalization of grief.[1] Mitchell and Anderson view support as listening, or even silent presence and empathy.[2] It is important for the bereaved to be able to retell their story of loss. Thus those who will spend time with the person who has suffered loss meet a need just as much as those who help with chores. Often the temptation is great to talk to the bereaved as much as possible, perhaps giving religious platitudes, when it is more helpful to be present and to listen to them tell their story or otherwise verbalize their grief.

It is customary in the Zimbabwean culture for people, upon arrival, to ask the bereaved how the person died or to make a remark that leads the bereaved to relate how the death occurred. This should be maintained and people should be encouraged to actively listen to the account and acknowledge their sorrow. Children are often inadvertently left out in this process because older people are usually better positioned socially to relate the account. The children's peers are usually not socially astute enough to initiate such a dialogue. In the Western world counselors have come up with a creative

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[1]Aiken, 252.

[2]Mitchell and Anderson, 118-120.

way of helping children to express themselves by writing or drawing. In so doing they are facilitating the retelling of the story. This is a technique that could be adapted and utilized in Zimbabwe.

Recognizing that a major goal of grief work is to emotionally disconnect from the deceased, Mitchell and Anderson suggest a third mode of caring, namely helping the bereaved to remember and to reminisce. They see the process of remembering and reminiscing with another person as a way to actively make the deceased a part of the memory and bringing emotional distance.[1] Remembering and reminiscing can begin with the preparations for the funeral and should be encouraged at significant times, such as anniversaries, holidays, and other appropriate times.[2] Reminiscing can be encouraged by making scrapbooks of pictures and written accounts. A note or verbal remark about the significance of the deceased can help the bereaved to remember. While reminiscing and remembering can be painful, Mitchell and Anderson see it as an essential part of grieving. "Working on a memory is like creating an internal emotional scrapbook."[3]

Mitchell and Anderson observe that for some people it is not easy to return to association with friends and relatives, and beginning new relationships may even be harder; hence the need for the reintegration mode of caring.[4] It may be necessary to assure

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[1]Ibid., 126.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., 127.

[4]Ibid., 134.

the bereaved that after a reasonable time of grieving that it is acceptable and appropriate to resume past contacts and to establish new relationships. Resuming normal life does not negate a sense of loss nor is it to be taken as a betrayal of the deceased. People who have suffered a similar loss are usually well positioned to help others to resume daily activities and to establish contacts.[1]

When ministering to the grieving it is necessary to establish what their needs are. In their sorrow, they may try to avoid some painful aspects of the necessary grief work. Meeting their needs will sometimes comprise intervention and support but at other times it will take the form of gently nudging and encouraging them to go through the processes of reminiscing and reintegration that they may be reluctant to go through.

Spiritual Needs and Opportunities

When faced with a crisis such as bereavement, people tend to reevaluate their belief system. Just as a physical obstacle can cause us to lose balance and then we try to re-balance by shifting position, so a bereavement may unbalance some people's faith and they may try to shift their belief system to make sense of their loss. For some people this may lead them to lose faith in God or their commitment to Him and His church. Likewise some who may not have been open to God will begin to reevaluate their priorities when confronted by a crisis. Bereavement, like many other crises, has the potential to assault faith or to open a door to faith.

When ministering to believers who have experienced loss it is important not only

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[1]Ibid., 135.

to meet their temporal needs but also to recognize that their faith is under attack. Twice in the account of Job's trials, he is commended because in all his suffering he did not sin (Job 1:22; 2:10). It would appear that the author recognized the potential to lose faith or at least to sin in the wake of loss.

Alice Cullinan writes,

> A common problem can be the conviction of some that faith keeps one immune from the pain of grieving and that strong faith alone is necessary and sufficient to handle loss. They do not realize that grieving is not a symptom of weakness or lack of faith, but a very human normal -- if painful -- response. Consequently, men and women with existential questions, shattered faith belief systems and heavy emotional burdens are reticent to raise their conflicted issues with clergy.[1]

It is very easy for members to avoid saying things to the pastors and other spiritual leaders that will reveal their supposed lack of faith. They will say only what they think the spiritual leader expects to hear.

Believers, in their grief, also struggle with the problem of theodicy, the question why a loving and all-powerful God would allow them to suffer. Mitchell and Anderson state that all believers face this question in one form or another in bereavement.[2] The question may not be phrased in theological terms but is felt on an existential level. Again members may not feel free to express these feelings to other believers and may themselves feel guilty having those thoughts.

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[1]Alice Cullinan, "Bereavement and the Sacred Art of Spiritual Care," in *Death and Spirituality*, ed. Kenneth J. Doka with John D. Morgan (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1993), 195.

[2]Mitchell and Anderson, 155.

This issue touches believers at the theological as well as the emotional level. Mitchell and Anderson observe:

> With very few exceptions, grieving people do not need, nor can they use a sermon about this practical and doctrinal problem. . . . The real problem is that sermons whose primary task is the clarification of doctrine are not a useful part of this particular ministry at this particular time.[1]

Addressing theodicy at the theological level should be a part of the ongoing teaching and preaching program. False theological presuppositions are best corrected when the members are not burdened by sorrow. Thus the minister who addresses this issue outside the immediate context of loss is providing a ministry to bereavement situations that may have happened earlier, and more so to those that will come.

When tragedy has struck, the major task is to deal with the emotions. Thus it is important to help the bereaved to continue to focus on God's love rather than to explain theological questions. During the time when they are confronted by the "silence of God" the love and compassion of their fellow believers is a tangible expression of God's care and concern.[2] Thus when God seems far away or absent, the community of faith should be a presence to the grieving person. Verbal expressions of God's love are thus hollow without the accompanying love of God's people.

Lewis R. Aiken in his list of things that help in grief recovery includes intensifying old social relationships and forming new ones.[3] The presence of other

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[1]Ibid., 156.

[2]Sullender, 117.

[3]Aiken, 252.

believers during bereavement can help to provide something to live for. In addition to the ministry of presence, the believers can help the grieving to focus on the resurrection as a means of inspiring hope. It is noteworthy that Jesus, in comforting Martha and Mary after the death of their brother Lazarus, spoke to them about the resurrection and later performed one for them. The Adventist church has been blessed with a clear understanding of the teaching of the resurrection. We need to keep this teaching before our people at all times so that in bereavement, the resurrection is a background on which to process their loss. Thus when we speak of the resurrection soon after bereavement, it is a cue to members to focus on that future event, rather than doctrinal clarification.

While loss may shake faith, it also has the capacity to disrupt a wayward life and lead people to seek meaning in life. The reevaluation of life and its meaning can make some people see the vanity of a life without God. It can also arouse a sense of the uncertainties of life. Making a commitment to God becomes a priority in the face of the reality of death. Sullender states that every loss experience is "an eschatological occurrence," highlighting the shortness of time. "When time is short, either cosmically or personally, one's normal values and priorities are dwarfed by the urgency of new 'ultimate concerns.'"[1]

It is important to note that the time immediately following loss is generally not the appropriate time to proselytize. This does not mean that there should never be any mention of God and belief in a grief situation. Judy Tatelbaum writes:

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[1]Sullender, 101.

> Sharing our spiritual beliefs can also give support to the bereaved, especially if we express uplifting ideas. We can share the solace we have received from our beliefs, but we must never try to push our beliefs on the bereaved. Using another's misfortune to try to 'sell' a particular belief system is taking an unfair advantage of someone very vulnerable.[1]

Sullender recognizes grief as a stimulant for growth. He insists, however, that people must be given space to grieve first before they are asked to grow from the experience. The early stages of grief are therefore not the best times to expect growth.[2] The fact that the window of opportunity for growth comes a little later in the grieving process is a motivation for pastors and congregations to maintain contact with the bereaved after the funeral. As the person goes through the transition of living without the loved one and begins to reevaluate priorities, God's presence should be incarnated by the ministry of the church.

Spiritual awakenings and revivals, whether caused by public evangelism or other factors, tend to have a short life-span unless they are promptly cultivated. This should highlight the need for the church to linger for a while with those who have experienced loss. This can be done by the ministry of members who may individually choose to minister this way or through support groups sponsored by the congregation.

Feelings of guilt are generally associated with grief. The mind often runs through the events leading to death and tries to find alternative events that could have prevented the loss. People often find themselves placing blame, sometimes on themselves, for the

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[1]Tatelbaum, 79, 80.

[2]Sullender, 85.

death. Since many deaths in Zimbabwe result from HIV/AIDS, a highly preventable infection, blame is passed around, if not publicly, certainly in private conversations. In many cases, survivors tend to place blame on themselves for their loss. Parents ask themselves where they went wrong when their children die. They charge themselves for failure to instill religion or morality that could have forestalled such an untimely death. Survivors may chide themselves for their role if the relationship with the deceased was strained, often taking more than a fair share or responsibility for the problems they had. Survivors may also experience some guilt because of a sense of relief following the death of someone who has been in long-term care.[1]

It is not practical to envisage a situation in which guilt is totally eradicated in each and every case. After all, imperfect people live in an imperfect world with imperfect relationships. We can, however, assist survivors, when the need arises, to have a realistic appraisal of themselves and the factors that affected the relationship. We can also help those who have been involved in long-term care of the terminally ill to understand in proper perspective the sense of relief that comes to them after the death of their loved one.

Doka observes that guilt often has a religious or spiritual component[2] and spiritual belief and rituals may have a role in resolving it.[3] The Christian faith has been given the theology of forgiveness and the assurance of Divine acceptance. In ministering to the

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[1]Doka and Morgan, 189.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., 190.

bereaved we can discuss these themes as we interact and minister to them. We can help them to see that all relationships are imperfect and that God's grace is needed and supplements our deficiency.

CHAPTER 6

THE FUNERAL MINISTRY

For most bereaved people the most significant demonstration of community support is the funeral. The funeral is likely to stand out in their memory for a long time. It is therefore important to make this event as beneficial as possible. Making a positive contribution takes deliberate effort by the pastor and the church. It is therefore necessary that the pastor take time to educate his or her church members on the role they should play at the funeral.

In this chapter I will address the guidelines on making the funeral effective in supporting the bereaved. I will discuss the need for pre-funeral and post-funeral ministry by the pastor or a surrogate. I will give some guidelines on delivering a death message. I will also discuss the functions of the funeral and how best to fulfill them. Because the sermon is a prominent feature of the service, I will give some suggestions on making it effective.

Pre-funeral Ministry

As soon as the pastor learns of the death or bereavement of a member, he or she should make an effort to go to the family to minister to them. The timely arrival of the pastor demonstrates not only professionalism, but also his or her sympathy. This contact,

before the funeral, is invaluable in setting the tone for the ministry of the pastor to the bereaved. Paul E. Irion writes,

> One who conducts the funeral for a bereaved family has a primary responsibility to establish a personal relationship with them. The quality of that relationship is the measure of his helpfulness in the funeral. The leader of the funeral must, as we have already said, see the mourners as persons, with individual needs and feelings. They must, in turn, see the leader as a person, concerned and capable of helping them through this difficult time. Unless some personal contact is possible prior to the funeral, it is all too likely that the mourners will be depersonalized and that the one conducting the funeral will appear as an anonymous specialist.[1]

His comment is pertinent to Adventist funerals in Zimbabwe because the low pastor to member ratio fosters anonymity.

The pre-funeral visit of the pastor not only conveys the pastor's professionalism and personal concern, it also helps the bereaved to focus on God. Al Cadenhead, Jr., writes, "As a minister he has the opportunity to provide an embodiment of Christ's love in a physical, tangible way. In a time of great need, the minister becomes a visible reminder of God's presence during the hours of pain."[2]

Because grief ministry takes place in the context of intense emotion, it is imperative that the minister seek Divine guidance and intervention. Our best efforts to comfort offer little without God, working through His Spirit to comfort. Dan S. Lloyd exhorts, "If you are not in the habit of praying over your responsibilities and

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[1]Paul E. Irion, *A Guide for Those Who Conduct a Humanist Funeral Service* (Baltimore: Waverly, 1971), 7.

[2]Al Cadenhead, Jr., *The Minister's Manual for Funerals* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1988), 16.

appointments, today is the day to start. More is accomplished when you pray first."[1] If our ministry is done in God's behalf, we should seek His direction so that He can use us despite our inadequacy. When God directs us He will lead us to do or say things that will be more effective in helping the bereaved than our most well-planned efforts.

While we recognize that God is able to overrule our best efforts when we pray, we should recognize that lack of preparation is not a virtue. The pastor needs to have a purpose for the pre-funeral visit. Paul E. Irion suggests some purposes for the pre-funeral visit, which include "making funeral arrangements, expressing sympathy, establishing rapport, assisting in the acceptance of the mourning process, and evaluating the dynamics of the mourning situation."[2] He warns, however, that the pastor should not be so rigid that he fails to be sensitive to needs that become apparent during the visit.[3] The important thing is that the pastor should determine in his or her mind the purpose of the visit and decide how to accomplish it.

In my view the primary purpose of the pre-funeral ministry is to bring support to the bereaved. The other purposes should all come within the context of this purpose. The pastor is a member of God's community of faith, before he or she is a pastor. If the visit of the pastor is perceived to be just utilitarian, then it is reduced to a perfunctory role. On the other hand, if the pastor can empathize with the people he or she will be able to build

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[1]Dan S. Lloyd, *Leading Today's Funerals: A Pastoral Guide for Improving Bereavement Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 1997, 25.

[2]Paul E. Irion, *The Funeral and the Mourners: Pastoral Care of the Bereaved* (New York: Abingdon, 1954), 145.

[3]Ibid., 145.

rapport and minister effectively. The more the bereaved persons sense that the pastor cares about their pain, the more likely they will appreciate his or her message and see its relevance to their grief situation.

One way to support the bereaved is to listen to them speak about their loss. It is important for the pastor to be willing to listen, and not to think that he or she has come to say something. Edgar N. Jackson describes how an elderly pastor came to his house shortly after an accident claimed his young son. When Jackson met him at the door, the elderly pastor took his hand in both of his and said nothing. He was invited in, and sat with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. Every few minutes he looked at Jackson and shook his head. He seemed to be in prayer. After a while he embraced Jackson. Then, again, he took his hand in both of his and then left, without saying a word. Jackson, commenting on this event, writes: "Grief is an emotion. Words tend to be intellectualizations."[1]

Indeed, many members in Zimbabwe are likely to think that the pastor who comes and leaves without sharing a message from the Bible or praying is negligent. However, pastors should not underestimate the value of their presence and willingness to listen. Listening, without trying to dictate how the bereaved should feel, will go a long way in building rapport with the bereaved.

If the pastor arrives on the scene shortly after death has occurred it may be too early to talk about funeral arrangements since none may have been made. However, I do

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[1]Edgar N. Jackson, "An Accidental Death: Don't Be Afraid of Silence," in *What Helped Me When My Loved One Died,* ed. Earl A. Grollman (Boston: Beacon, 1981), 51.

not rule out making funeral arrangements in the first visit, particularly in the Zimbabwean context. If the family wishes to expedite the funeral, arrangements will need to be made quickly. In fact, there will be times when the most practical thing for the pastor to do is simply prolong the initial visit so that he also conducts the funeral service. This is because of the lack of efficient transportation services, particularly in the rural areas, makes it hard to travel back and forth.

The pastor should involve the family as much as possible in planning the funeral service. It is common for Zimbabwean families to yield this responsibility to the pastor out of deference to him or her. The pastor can tactfully find ways to involve the family, by asking for suggestions on specific matters, such as the choice of songs, Scripture reading, starting time, and duration of the service. As much as possible, the pastor should encourage the family to be a part of the service, both in planning and in participation. Kenneth J. Doka states, "Participation allows symbolic mastery, often so important in the chaos that loss brings."[1]

By planning with the family the pastor is able to negotiate the conduct of the funeral when necessary. Some members of the extended family, particularly non-believers, may expect to perform some rituals that the pastor intends to sidestep for theological reasons.[2] Negotiating such matters ahead of time with the concerned parties is more graceful than trying to stop rituals that are already in progress.

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[1]Doka, "The Spiritual Crisis of Bereavement," 187.

[2]Chapter 3 discusses some of the rituals and their significance.

Delivering a Death Message

In Zimbabwe it is common for the pastor to be requested to deliver a death message to members of the family who may not yet have received the news. It is never easy to deliver a death notification, particularly if the person did not expect it. There is no magic formula to break the news painlessly. It is important, however, to keep this difficult task of death notification in perspective. The loss by death is what hurts the survivor. Your delivery of the message is hurtful, only because it makes the person aware of the loss. Thus, your delivering the news does not in itself hurt the person, it is a ministry that you are performing. This realization does not take away the pain of delivering bad news but it clarifies the role that we are asked to play. It is an unpleasant but necessary role of ministry.

There is no way to deliver bad news other than to tell it. However, we should try to find ways to deliver death messages compassionately. It is important to prepare ahead of time the actual words that you will use. Failure to do this will result in stumbling along and looking for words. It is also necessary that the one who delivers death news has as much relevant information as possible. This information includes the name of the deceased, the place and time of death, the cause of death, and the location of the body.

Death messages should be delivered in person rather than by phone. This allows you to attend to any needs the person might have. It is not possible to anticipate the reaction of the one who receives death news. Reactions can include outbursts of wailing, confusion, shock, fainting, or even a heart attack. If the pastor knows that there is a possibility for a health emergency, following a death notification he or she should prepare

for it. Whenever possible the pastor could make an effort to have medical assistance available. In Zimbabwe it is not always feasible to have medical personnel on hand when delivering death messages. It would be advisable for pastors to acquaint themselves with basic resuscitation procedures.

Because it is not possible to anticipate the reaction of the one who receives death news, it is recommended that the death message be broken in a quiet place, away from the public. As much as possible, try to get the person to sit down so that it will be easier to manage any reactions. It is best to stay with the person for a while to ensure that he or she is all right. After delivering a death message, it would be appropriate to get the person to talk. James North suggests that after breaking the news one should ask the person about their relationship with the deceased. He also recommends that the person should be asked if they need any assistance.[1]

Larry A. Platt and Roger G. Branch warn against attempts to fill in gaps in the death news to make it less painful or because the person has asked them a question whose answer they do not know. They caution that inaccuracies will come to light. "If your integrity as a messenger is destroyed, your role as comforter will be compromised."[2]

Happyson D. Musvosvi, a medical doctor, says that he has found it helpful to introduce the news by relating how the efforts by the medical personnel were unhelpful.

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[1]James North, interview by author, 5 November, 2004, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

[2]Larry A. Platt and Roger G. Branch, "How Do I Tell Them? The Gentle Art of Death Notification," in *Resources for Ministry in Death and Dying,* ed. Larry A. Platt and Roger G. Branch (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 247, 248.

He does this in just a few sentences so that the person receiving the message is not kept in suspense for too long. The brief account of the problem allows the person to anticipate that something is amiss. When he breaks the news the person is already expecting an unfavorable outcome.[1] Even though pastors cannot speak from the medical perspective, they can adapt the same technique. They could speak in more general terms about how an illness turned for the worst and proceed to break the news. Following Happyson Musvosvi's suggestion, I have found it helpful to begin by saying, "We have received bad news about a member of your family." I then go on to the specific details.

Some have discouraged the use of euphemisms in delivering death messages as well as in conversations and ceremonies because, they claim, their use is an attempt to deny the reality of death. Platt and Branch, for example, write, "Saying that someone has 'passed away' in no way changes the stark reality that he has died."[2] While this statement is true, we must not underestimate the value of euphemisms. Euphemisms are usually well understood, and society uses them as tools to ease the communication of painful or embarrassing themes. To avoid well-understood euphemisms in death talk, in my view, is to ignore a relevant tool that language has placed at our disposal.

The Funeral Service

Writing about funerals, Irion writes, "Form Follows Function. Design must, therefore, be related to usefulness and efficiency. But, even more, design seeks to

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[1]Happyson D. Musvosvi, interview by author, 23 August, 2004, Yuba City, CA.

[2]Platt and Branch, 245.

integrate usefulness and beauty."[1] Irion's assertion here is a challenge to forms, which have developed, yet they no longer serve a recognizable function. At times these forms actually contradict some major forms of the funeral. He proceeds to suggest four major functions of the funeral service.

First, the funeral serves to provide a supportive framework for mourners.[2] This function is fulfilled when the community comes together to be with the bereaved and gives tokens of their support such as food, flowers, and other favors. Irion writes, "The funeral fulfils the function of providing a supportive relationship most adequately when maximum participation by the community is enabled. This means that it is best when the funeral can be so arranged that a maximum number of the community can be present and participating. It also means that those in attendance should be participants rather than merely observers."[3] Because of the dynamics at play in Zimbabwe, maximum participation by the community is not always possible, however, it is necessary to continue the attempt to schedule funerals with the community in mind. It is also necessary to find ways to involve those in attendance in more ways than singing. Responsive reading is one way to encourage participation. Since the local hymn books do not have responsive readings, these could be specifically printed for the occasion. In churches where the level of literacy is low, the congregation may be asked to echo a reading that is

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[1]Irion, "The Funeral and the Bereaved," 212.

[2]Ibid., 212.

[3]Ibid., 213.

read from the front.

Platt and Branch recognize the importance of maximum attendance and participation by the community at funerals. However, they also warn that large numbers at funerals do not necessarily constitute social support. In fact, they note that a crowd can present problems that tend to erase the comfort of their presence. The hustle and bustle of a crowd can be irritating when the mourner would like a quiet atmosphere. Platt and Branch, therefore, suggest that it may be necessary to provide the bereaved access to a secluded place to use when they need it.[1] In this way the bereaved can have the benefit of community support and yet also have privacy when that is necessary.

A second function for the funeral which Irion identifies is that it reinforces the reality of death.[2] He discourages efforts to disguise the reality of death, either by cosmetics that give the illusion of life to the corpse or by other practices, such as covering the pile of dirt or having a funeral service without the body present.[3] The Zimbabwean community, fortunately, still comes face to face with the reality of death at funerals. Mourners usually have a chance to view their loved one. They symbolically bury the dead when they throw into the grave a pinch of soil. They also watch the grave being filled up. It is important, however, that in the funeral service, the idea of the present loss should not be completely overshadowed by attempts to present the hope of the resurrection.

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[1]Branch and Platt, 187.

[2]Irion, "The Funeral and the Bereaved," 214.

[3]Ibid., 214, 215.

To Irion, the third function of the funeral is to enable the acknowledgment and the expression of the feelings of the mourner.[1] The mourner needs to be free to express the variety of emotions which he or she feels. Sometimes expression of emotion may be verbalized and at times it is acted out in the rites at the funeral. Because Irion recognizes this function of the funeral, he rejects any attempts to avoid pain and the expression of feelings. He discourages funerals without the body, private funerals, and brief funerals, if the purpose is to avoid the expression of feeling.[2]

Funerals in Zimbabwe are marked by mourning. The expression of grief is usually not suppressed. My observation, however, is that in most cases feelings of anger are either not acknowledged or not expressed appropriately. There is need to help people to recognize that anger is normal and then encourage them to vent it in appropriate ways.

The fourth function of the funeral that Irion identifies is that it is a fitting conclusion to the life of the deceased.[3] It is therefore an appropriate time to express our respect and appreciation for the life of the deceased. This does not mean idealizing the deceased, but it is a time to recognize his or her contributions. It is also a time to acknowledge how much the deceased will be missed as survivors focus on pleasant memories with the deceased. Because of the value of human life, it is necessary to mark the end with a dignified ceremony. It is also important that those affected by the loss

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[1]Ibid., 215.

[2]Ibid., 215, 216.

[3]Ibid., 216.

participate in rituals that affirm that a life has ended.

Edgar N. Jackson notes that ceremonies are elaborate ways of doing things that do not have to be done except to satisfy emotional needs. He goes on to point out that ceremonies are investments in meaning.[1] The value of ceremonies may be in that they enable the survivors to participate in marking the end of the life of the deceased. Since the funeral is a fitting conclusion to the life of deceased, it should be conducted with dignity. This does not mean that it should be expensive. It does mean that participants must be prepared for what they will do and know the timing of their part. The pastor should realize, however, that because of the intensity of emotions, participants may find themselves overcome by emotions, particularly if they had a close relationship with the deceased.[2]

While Irion does not mention the instilling of hope as a function of the funeral, he does recognize it as an integral part of the Christian funeral. He writes, "If persons are unable to share in the meaning of the resurrection, the Christian funeral is lacking in significance for them."[3] The death of a loved one challenges hope. It may be the hope that we had that he or she will recover from the illness. There is also the hope or aspirations

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[1]Edgar N. Jackson, *For the Living* (Des Moines: Channel, 1963), 37.

[2]At one funeral an elder who was usually very eloquent suddenly became speechless when it was his turn to speak. This was his brother's funeral and he had asked to speak to the congregation. The chorister led the congregation in a song at the direction of the pastor. The elder sat down and when the singing ended he resumed his speech. This illustrates that events will not always go as planned; however, these changes must be accommodated.

[3]Irion, *The Funeral: Vestige or Value?* 163.

that parents, and indeed other associates, have in the future of their loved one. At death, that hope is dashed to pieces. Thus, bereavement often includes a sense of the loss of that which might have been, particularly if death occurs in childhood or in the prime of life. The death of a loved one also brings us face to face with our own mortality. Thus, in bereavement there is a crisis of hope. Paul recognized the importance of hope and exhorted believers to comfort one another with the message of the hope of the resurrection (1 Thess 4:13-18).

In view of this teaching of Paul, an important function of the funeral is to inspire hope. Without hope, there is little difference between the grief of believers and nonbelievers. Christian funerals should, therefore, be characterized by messages of hope. The theme of hope should be prominent in the music, sermon, prayer, and other elements of the Christian funeral.

Howard C. Raether notes that the funeral is *of* the deceased but *for* the bereaved.[1] Funerals, therefore, should be planned and conducted so that they benefit the bereaved. This realization should lead us to consider the needs of the bereaved and how the funeral can meet them.

Raether notes that there is a growing number of people who plan their own funeral before they die. While he recognizes that this can bring peace of mind to the person who is prearranging his or her own funeral, he suggests that the survivors-to-be should be a

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[1]Howard C. Raether, "Rituals, Beliefs, and Grief," in *Death and Spirituality,* ed. Kenneth J. Doka with John D. Morgan (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1993), 211.

part of this process since they are the ones who should benefit from the funeral.[1]

The question that arises is what to do if the deceased had prearranged his or her funeral without the contribution of the survivors. How should survivors address funeral wishes that were expressed by their loved one before he or she died? In the Zimbabwean society the wishes of the deceased are often allowed to overrule any other considerations. Fear of reprisal by the spirit of the deceased is definitely a factor that causes many to comply with these wishes.

As Adventists we are enlightened by our theology. Since the dead do not know anything, it is futile to go to great lengths just to fulfill wishes they expressed while they were still alive, particularly if the wishes relate to the handling of the body. The deceased may have expressed a wish to be buried in a certain place. Fulfilling these wishes may often mean that the survivors have to incur additional expenses. We should also be aware that the circumstances in which the deceased expressed his or her wishes may have changed. For example, the financial standing of the family may change. The guiding principle is that the funeral should benefit and meet the needs of the living. If funeral wishes are inordinately difficult or too expensive to fulfill, the living should not feel bound to fulfill them.

Another category of wishes relates to the funeral program. This includes the use of the deceased's favorite song or Scripture and the order of service. Fulfilling this kind of wish usually would not involve expenses. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with this practice. It can facilitate reminiscing on the deceased which tends to help the grieving

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[1]Ibid., 210, 211.

process. The use of the favorite songs or Scripture of the deceased is beneficial to the extent that it helps the survivors to reminisce. It can also be helpful because the intense emotions that accompany the song or text at the funeral can help to etch them into the memory of the survivors.

The Funeral Sermon

In the Adventist church in Zimbabwe a funeral service would be incomplete without a sermon. Because it is a significant part of the funeral its functions must be consistent with those of the funeral. Thus, the preacher should recognize that the community has come together to support the bereaved. Other than by verbal acknowledgment, one way of recognizing the community support is to refrain from preaching sermons that tend to disenfranchise some sectors of the group. Doctrinal sermons fail to be inclusive and are therefore inappropriate.

The sermon should also avoid the impression that grief is a sign of lack of faith or hope. On the contrary a good sermon will legitimize the expression of grief and then point the bereaved to God for comfort. One way to do this is to tell the mourners that grief is normal and to be expected. Another way is for the pastor to relate his or her own shock and grief feelings.

The funeral sermon is not the place for a philosophical discussion on why God allows suffering. The answers we may proffer usually ring hollow in an immediate grief situation. God's dealings with His children are often unexplainable from our vantage point. Mitchell and Anderson note that even though the bereaved are asking why a loving

and all-powerful God would allow suffering, their minds are not ready to grapple with this concept. This topic should be addressed in sermons and teachings outside the immediate grief context.[1] At this time it is better to emphasize that God has not forgotten us and that He grieves with us when we have met with loss.

Preachers should remember that funerals are occasions of intense emotions. Because of this the attention span and the ability to concentrate are greatly lessened. It is, therefore, wise to make the sermon short and simple.[2] The use of texts and illustrations that can be visualized will help people to focus on the sermon. Thus, the analogy of the Shepherd who walks with His sheep in the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23) is better than the explanation that God is with us even when we face gloomy days. Biographical material on the deceased or the bereaved can be used, with the permission of the family, to illustrate the meaning of a text. James North notes that some of the most memorable funeral sermons use biographical material from the life of the deceased. He cites a time when a seven-year-old girl told him that her late father used to allow her to sit on his lap while he drove. He allowed her to steer the car while he kept his own hands on the steering wheel. North used this information, with the permission of the family, to illustrate how Jesus keeps His hands on the "steering wheel of our lives."[3] The preacher can remind the bereaved family of how God led them through other hard times. He or she

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[1]Mitchell and Anderson, 155.

[2]George W. Bowman III, *Dying, Grieving, Faith and Family* (New York: Haworth, 1998), 109.

[3]James North, interview by author, 22 November, 2004, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

can use this to encourage them to trust in the same hand that led them in the past.

Appropriate topics in grief situations include the love of God, His care, and His presence. Because the hopes of the bereaved have been assaulted, an important message at the funeral is the resurrection. We should note, however, that the sermon purpose is not to prove the resurrection. That can be done at other times. The funeral sermon should simply hold up the resurrection and the second coming of Jesus as the blessed hope to people in despair.

One temptation that funerals present to the preacher is to give the impression that the deceased will be saved. The desire to comfort may be so overwhelming to some preachers that they end up losing their credibility by always implying that the deceased will be saved. Sometimes the life of the deceased clearly belies such assertions. The listeners may appear to appreciate that, but they are likely to question the preacher's credibility. It is far better to refrain from making those suggestions unless the deceased demonstrated a genuine relationship with the Lord. Even then the preacher should recognize that he or she can only judge from outward appearances but God alone can read the heart (1 Sam 16:7). The preacher is therefore not qualified to make any determination unequivocally. It may be better to say that the fate of the deceased is in the hands of a loving God who knows best how to deal with His children.

Funeral sermons are not easy to prepare. One reason for this, particularly in Zimbabwe, is the fact that there is a limited time between death and the funeral. As mentioned earlier, pastors often find it necessary to conduct the funeral service during their first visit to the bereaved. To avoid the problem of having to prepare a sermon at

such short notice it is wise for pastors to prepare material ahead of time that can then be quickly put together as a sermon. If pastors study ahead of time the themes that make appropriate sermons for funerals, they can draw on the material and adapt it to the situation at hand.

In the final preparation of the sermon, pastors should consider the variables, such as the age and gender of the deceased. They should also consider variables in the circumstances of death. The circumstances of the survivors can also influence the sermon. For example, if the deceased is survived by younger children, the pastor could include in his or her sermon the theme of God providing for the fatherless. Irion reminds us that, like the funeral, the sermon is for the living.[1] He writes,

> It is not extreme to suggest that just as funeral manuals contain long lists of sermon suggestions for various types of people who have died -- mothers, aged, church officers, sufferers, and so on -- it should be possible to conceive a number of sermon themes which approach the funeral sermon in terms of the various types of mourners and the needs which are represented in their lives.[2]

For most people preaching at funerals will always be difficult. Yet God has called us to minister to the bereaved. Funeral sermons are a powerful way to minister to the grieving.

The Place of Grieving at the Funeral

"Grief, like other emotions denied outlet, can go off in the most devastating

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[1]Irion, *The Funeral and the Mourners,* 106.

[2]Ibid., 108.

fashion," writes C. Charles Bachmann.[1] When grief is inhibited, problems may arise later that will require psychotherapy or other treatment that the pastor cannot give. It is far better for the bereaved to deal with their grief than try to avoid it.

Earlier in this chapter we discussed that one of the purposes of the funeral is to enable the bereaved to express their grief. Funerals in Zimbabwe are marked by much crying, particularly among the women. On occasion some well-meaning people urge mourners, particularly men, to control their grief. Unfortunately in the Shona language, the verb *kunyaradza,* " to comfort," is literally "to make quiet" or "to silence." Believers, eager to comfort, are occasionally heard urging the mourners to stop crying or to limit the expression of grief.[2] Stopping someone from crying is not really the same thing as comforting. Comforting should rather be understood as support for the mourner without dictating the duration or intensity of grieving. The expression of grief is determined by the temperament of the mourner.

It is customary for the people who come to visit, particularly those who are closely associated with the deceased or the bereaved, to start mourning aloud as they arrive. Those who have already been at the funeral join in the mourning which lasts for a few minutes after which they calm down and they converse about their loss. This is

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[1]C. Charles Bachmann, *Ministering to the Grief Sufferer* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 59.

[2]At my mother's funeral I remember pastors counseling my brothers and me that we should control ourselves. We were reminded that we were believers and that some of us were pastors and we needed to restrain ourselves to demonstrate to others that we had the hope of the resurrection.

repeated each time other significant relatives or friends arrive.

Some people have suggested that when people begin to mourn only as they arrive at the homestead they are not genuinely sorrowful. They assume that since the person did not mourn before this time, their tears are just a hypocritical display. In my view such a criticism fails to recognize the social dimension of grief. The presence of others has an influence on grief expression. Thus, the sight of a significant person can precipitate a grief reaction. Cuthbert Machamire, speaking of this phenomenon, suggests that the wailing and mourning of the new arrivals at funerals invites the others to join in the mourning. It is in fact a cultural way of saying, "Come and weep with me."[1]
Ellen G. White comments on the grief of many Bible characters when they were bereaved. She does not chide them for grieving. For instance she wrote of Martha, "In her disappointment and grief she had not lost confidence in Jesus, and added, 'But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it unto thee.'"[2] Grief is, therefore, not a denial of faith.

Ellen G. White remarks about the grief of her own son Willie after the death of his wife. "Poor Willie is indeed bereaved. He never is demonstrative, therefore he will mourn alone and feel it deeper. My heart is sore and sad."[3] She understood that when grief is not

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[1]Cuthbert Machamire, telephone interview by author, July 21, 2004.

[2]Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998), 59.

[3]Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Material* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 678.

expressed, it is felt more intensely.

However, Ellen White also counseled against excesses. To a bereaved family she counseled,

> Like Job, you felt that you had cause for grief, and would not be comforted. Was this reasonable? You know that death is a power that none can resist; but you have made your lives nearly useless by your unavailing grief. Your feelings have been little less than rebellion against God. I saw you all dwelling upon your bereavement, and giving way to your excitable feelings, until your noisy demonstrations of grief caused angels to hide their faces and withdraw from the scene.[1]

On the surface this quotation may sound harsh, however, we should remember that authorities on bereavement also recognize that mourning can go too far. Collin Murray Parkes notes that sometimes it may take another person to point out that mourning has lasted long enough and to nudge them on beyond their tears.[2] Ellen White's comments to this family suggest that they had dwelt too long in their grief and they seemed to nurture a gloomy atmosphere. She wrote further, "As a family you have talked darkness and complaining until you are changed into the same image. You seem to work upon one another's sympathies and to arouse nervous excitability until you have a dark, sad, dismal time by yourselves."[3]

Ellen White gives us glimpses into her own grief experiences. She acknowledged

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Nampa, ID: Pacific, 1948), 313.

[2]Collin Murray Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies in Grief in Adult Life* (New York: International Universities, 1972), 175.

[3]Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:314.

her sorrow and sadness. Of the times her children died she writes,

> In 1860 death stepped over our threshold, and broke the youngest branch of our family tree. Little Herbert, born Sept. 20, 1860, died December 14 of the same year. When that tender branch was broken, how our hearts did bleed none may know but those who have followed their little ones of promise to the grave.
> But oh, when our noble Henry died, at the age of sixteen,--when our sweet singer was borne to the grave, and we no more heard his early song,--ours was a lonely home. Both parents and the two remaining sons felt the blow most keenly. But God comforted us in our bereavements, and with faith and courage we pressed forward in the work He had given us, in bright hope of meeting our children who had been torn from us by death, in that world where sickness and death will never come.[1]

When her husband died, she wrote, "I keenly feel my loss, but dare not give myself up to useless grief. This would not bring back the dead."[2] However, she also mentions that for a year she suffered greatly. The responsibility that she now had to bear alone seemed too much for her. Besides she was in such poor health at the time that her own life was in danger.[3] Arthur L. White writes, "It was a full year after James White's death in early August, 1881, before she was sufficiently recovered from physical prostration, grief, and overwhelming concern for Battle Creek to engage in a consistent program of book preparation."[4]

In a letter to a widow, Ellen G. White refers to her own experience with grief.

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 165, 166.

[2]Ibid., 254.

[3]Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God,* 219.

[4]Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White,* vol. 3, *The Lonely Years 1876-1891* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1984), 194.

> We sympathize with you in your bereavement and widowhood. I have passed over the ground that you are now traveling, and know what it means. How much sorrow there is in our world! How much grief! How much weeping! It is not right to say to the bereaved ones, "Do not weep; it is not right to weep." Such words have little consolation in them. There is no sin in weeping.[1]

Writing about the time when Herbert, her infant son, lay critically sick, she says she gave vent to her feelings with bitter tears, but when he died she says she could not weep.[2] It is not immediately clear from, the context, why she could not shed tears. However it is important to note that the death of her infant son resulted in uncertainty about her future. While he was alive, she felt sure that God expected her to care for him and was glad that at least for one winter she would not have to travel. She writes, "But when he was removed, I was again thrown into great uncertainty. The drowsy state of God's people nearly crushed me."[3] The anguish she felt caused her to faint many times and her husband feared for her life.[4]

Ellen White's responsibility as a messenger of God seemed to loom high in her mind even in times of her bereavement. It is not easy to decide to what extent her grief experience should be a model for others, since she had prophetic responsibilities that she alone could execute. Few of us are similarly charged by God to take roles that no others

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 264.

[2]Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases,* vol. 10 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), 22.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

can fill.

Merlin Burt, reflecting on this puzzling experience, notes that we should not forget that it is the prophet's message that is inspired, not the responses he or she makes to circumstances. He cites the response of Jonah to the call to preach in Nineveh. His response to God was not inspired but his message to Nineveh was.[1] Can it be that likewise Ellen White's response to her bereavement is not inspired? It seems to me that because of her unique responsibilities some of the things she did or did not do are not necessarily a model for us.[2] What is clear is that bereavement caused her grief, even though for some reason she could not shed tears at this time. It is also clear that she hung onto the hope of seeing her loved one in heaven.

Expressions of grief are perfectly legitimate at funerals and beyond. Funerals are supposed to afford to the bereaved an opportunity to express their grief. However, believers need not mourn as if they have no hope. The belief in the resurrection helps us to put our losses into proper perspective. Even if the deceased was not a believer, our pain, though intense, is tempered by the knowledge that the fate of our loved one is in the hands of a loving God.

The need for grief expression has implications for funerals. First, the common practice in non-Adventist funerals in Zimbabwe to drink alcohol is inappropriate. In my

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[1]Merlin Burt, interview by author, November 22, 2004, Berrien Springs, MI.

[2]A good example of this is the time when she left her son Henry, then only fourteen months old, in the care of the Howland family. This arrangement continued for five years! See Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Biography*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), 152.

view drunkenness at funerals is a classic example of grief avoidance. Adventist pastors need to use whatever influence they have in the community to teach against this practice outside immediate bereavement. Second, Adventist pastors should not be disturbed by tears. When people weep, even after the pastor has preached, it is not a sign that the sermon was ineffective. At a meeting in the early 1990s some pastors raised a concern about relatives of deceased people who arrived late at funerals and insisted on viewing the body after the sermon had been preached already. The discussion centered on how best to decline this request. The pastors reasoned that if the people cried after the sermon, then the sermon was to no avail. Unless the sermon was meant to dissuade people from crying, there is no need to feel that the sermon is nullified by tears.

Post-Funeral Ministry

Paul E. Irion observes that when a pastor pays no further attention to the bereaved after the funeral, he or she displays sheer professionalism in the worst sense of the word. He compares it to sophisticated witch doctoring in which the pastor says a few words over the body, to appease the spirits and then he goes home.[1] Post-funeral ministry is not only meant to project a good impression of the pastor, it is a ministry to people who need it. For some mourners the days and weeks after the funeral are the hardest because the people who supported them earlier have resumed their usual routine. The employer expects them back at work at the same time that other daily routines must resume. It is important to visit the bereaved a day or two after the funeral, and again about a week

[1]Irion, *The Funeral and the Mourners,* 161.

afterwards. Sunderland observes that in the year following loss, special days like birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries are particularly painful for the bereaved. He suggests that a pastoral visit on those days is not only warranted but it may be the critical factor to move the bereaved towards resolution.[1]

Irion notes that post-funeral visits can be very productive because after the funeral the bereaved is usually not hurried in his or her conversations. This is because there is less pressure of activities and the intense emotions reached before the funeral have receded.[2] The pastor can therefore assist the mourners to continue to express their grief. "The strong feelings which are present in bereavement create inner tensions which demand release."[3] Release comes when the mourner is allowed the expression of feelings.

Post-funeral ministry can also help the bereaved to realize the necessity of reintegration into society by forming new relationships and interests. However, Irion cautions against taking this step too quickly. Thus he suggests that it is possible that new relationships and new interests formed too quickly can result in a frenzy of activity too soon. This can result in further disintegration rather than in integration. The consideration to be made is whether the activities and the relationships are a way to escape from their thinking about the loss. "The loss must be apprehended before the therapeutic work of

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[1]Ronald H. Sunderland, *Getting Through Grief: Caregiving by Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 80.

[2]Irion, *The Funeral and the Mourners*, 162.

[3]Ibid., 165.

reintegration can take place.[1]

Irion also notes that post-funeral ministry offers the opportunity of helping the mourner to understand the Christian view of death and the resurrection. This can be done only after the mourners have transcended their personal loss, making it possible for them to interact at an intellectual level.[2] At this point it is appropriate to lead the people to Christ and eventually share with them our doctrines.

Ronald H. Sunderland recognizes that post-funeral ministry is impractical for the pastor alone, even in relatively small congregations. He therefore recommends that churches should start grief support groups. He writes, "Such ministry is [possible] only when using the gifts of lay ministers."[3] In 1954, Irion wrote, "Although to my knowledge it has seldom been attempted, there are very real possibilities for improving our ministry to the bereaved through the techniques of group therapy".[4] In the Western world functional grief support groups are a common feature of the life of many congregations. In Zimbabwe, however, support groups are still a novel idea. Yet if they are implemented, their usefulness will become evident and they will take root.

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[1]Ibid., 164.

[2]Ibid., 165.

[3]Sunderland, 80.

[4]Irion, *The Funeral and the Mourners*, 165.

CHAPTER 7

THE PASTORAL TRAINING PROGRAM

The success of the grief support program in the local church is determined to a large degree by the pastor. If the pastor sees this as a legitimate ministry of the church he or she will invest time and effort to start it and to keep its momentum. Virtually every pastor recognizes that the church must be involved whenever one of its members dies or is bereaved. Most pastors also recognize that there are times when they should be involved in the funerals of other people in the community. However, not all pastors recognize that grief ministry means more than attending or conducting a funeral. Besides, as already discussed earlier, some of our ministers and members see funerals as opportunities for evangelism and doctrinal teaching.

The purpose of the training program is to help pastors understand the grieving process and to find more effective ways of supporting the bereaved. The program also seeks to help pastors recognize that by employing an extended ministry to the bereaved they open new opportunities to witness and evangelize. The pastor will stimulate his or her church to nurture the contacts made through support group ministry so that the gospel may be shared at the appropriate time and in an appropriate manner. A key aspect of the grief ministry program is to establish and maintain a grief support system that will

continue to minister to the bereaved after the funeral. This approach will be new to the Zimbabwean situation. It is necessary, however, to adopt support groups because the traditional support system continues to erode.

While it is desirable for every pastor to embrace the program immediately, it may not be a practical expectation. I intend to introduce the program to a few pastors at first and then expand it to others. A pilot program with a few pastors who are committed to it will demonstrate the viability of support groups. Attempting to train all the pastors at once is likely to render the program ineffective. Focusing on a smaller group of interested pastors will mean that the trainer is working with a group that believes in the program and they are committed to its implementation. Success stories from the initial group will be an impetus to spread the program to other districts.

Design of the Training Program[1]

The training program for pastors will be in two segments. The first segment will be the formal training. Workbooks will be used so that the information discussed will be reinforced by the process of writing. They will also provide the pastors with notes that they can refer to later on. Pastors can also use the same workbooks when they train their members to facilitate support groups. The second segment will be practical participation as co-facilitators with me in an upcoming support group program. This will provide an opportunity for the pastors to implement what they will have learned in the formal

[1]Material that will be used to run the training program is in the Appendix section of this dissertation.

training.

In the first segment I will review the grief process, funeral ministry, anticipatory grief, and other related subjects. The content of the training program will be based on the material in earlier chapters of this dissertation as well as from other sources. An important aspect of the training will be to engage the pastors in identifying the aspects of the Zimbabwean culture that help or hinder in the grief process. There will also be an attempt to adapt some ideas from the Western world on grief ministry to the Zimbabwean situation. For example, the idea of several pastoral visits to the bereaved after the funeral is excellent, but it will be extremely difficult in Zimbabwe. However, the Zimbabwean pastor can adapt that idea by assigning this role to trained elders and additional selected surrogates.

Another idea from the Western world that I will incorporate into my training program is the concept of support groups. This is an effective and efficient model of ministry that has relevance to Zimbabwe, particularly because of the low pastor-to-member ratio.[1] It is necessary, however, to adapt this idea to meet the needs of the Zimbabwean community. Because the Zimbabwean community tends to be modest in expressing personal feelings to casual acquaintances, worksheets will initiate discussion. Discussions in the support group sessions will mostly be in the third person; however, the questions in the worksheets will be personalized. Pastors will be asked to assure participants that their worksheets will not be turned in and what they wrote will not need

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[1]Based on the latest statistics a district pastor has an average of 2,858 members under his or her care. See e-mail correspondence from D. Mutanga, the Secretary of the East Zimbabwe Conference, in Appendix D.

to be disclosed to anyone.

At the conclusion of the first segment (the formal training) the pastors will be invited to attend a support group program and to be co-facilitators with me. Ideally this support group program will be scheduled to begin the week following the conclusion of the first segment of training. Each pastor will be given specific assignments to fulfill at each session. At the end of each session I will meet with the pastors to debrief them.

During support group sessions inter-participant interaction and fellowship will be encouraged. Participants will be encouraged to meet outside the support group sessions for companionship, support, and mutual prayer. In this way the gap caused by waning familial and communal support will be reduced as new supportive relationships are forged.

The grief support groups will eventually be run by the trained lay members.[1] In this training program the pastors will, therefore, be challenged to train their members after they themselves have facilitated support groups for a while. It is my hope that the pastors will not relegate this ministry to members once it gains momentum. The pastor is first and foremost a member of the church and in addition to that he or she trains others to participate in ministry. Thus, as the pastor has the opportunity to be a facilitator of a support group, he or she should not ignore it as a ministry to be done only by the members.

Since the intention is to have the support groups conducted by members, the

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[1]Sunderland recommends this approach. See Sunderland, 81.

training program will be simple enough to be understood by members who may have a limited education. The training program will avoid being too technical, as this may be intimidating. Thus the focus of the training will be on the "how to" rather than on the theoretical.

Pastors will be encouraged to select support group facilitators from former participants. Sunderland notes that members who have resolved their own grief usually provide effective support to others.[1] These people will, therefore, have learned by observation and by serving as co-leaders with a more experienced facilitator before independently leading a group.

The program that I have outlined above is the pilot version. It will be modified as it becomes necessary. The needs of the community will influence how the program will evolve. Larry Yeagley notes that, in his support groups, he has discontinued the use of workbooks and videos because participants prefer to share their feelings and experiences. He sees the use of elaborate workbooks as a distraction from the group interaction.[2] This is an example of how a program can be modified by the needs of the community.

In my program, however, I will use worksheets. When resources become available video material will be incorporated into the training and support group programs.[3] However, it is possible that in subsequent versions of this program I will sense the need

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[1]Ibid., 101.

[2]Larry Yeagley, *Grief Support Group Manual* (n.p. by author, 2000), 1, 2.

[3]*GriefShare* is an example of a program that does use these resources in the support group sessions in the Western world. See http://www.griefrecovery.com/

to relinquish the use of some of this material, just as Larry Yeagley has done. The Zimbabwean culture, like all others, is dynamic. This may eventually lead people to be less protective of their personal feelings and experiences. However, in the initial stages of the program it is necessary to have a blueprint from which to work.

Implementation

The pilot training program will be conducted in the East Zimbabwe Conference at the Conference facilities. A maximum of ten individuals will be involved in this training program. The ten people will include five pastors and five elders. The first criterion for the selection of participants will be that they have lost a family member or very close friend to death in the past twelve months. A recent bereavement experience will motivate them to be involved in grief ministry. This program may help them in their recovery from loss. The second criterion is a desire to be involved in bereavement ministry. The enthusiasm from this initial group of trainees will promote subsequent training sessions and the establishment of support groups in other districts.

Meeting times will be determined in consultation with participating elders and pastors. Sundays will be proposed because that is when elders would be available to participate in the training program. The training will be a twelve-hour program, divided into three-hour segments over four weeks. The training itself will be in six units.

The first unit will discuss the call to grief ministry by both pastors and members. I will refer to 2 Cor 1:3, 4 to demonstrate that believers are called upon to recognize God's comforting ministry in their own lives and then to replicate it to others. 1 Thess 4:18 will

be used to emphasize the need for personal involvement in grief ministry. I will draw from the material in chapter 5 to highlight that there is a biblical mandate for grief ministry. I will also cite statements of Ellen G. White on the role of the human agency cooperating with God in ministering to others.

The second unit will demonstrate that grief reaction is consistent with Christian belief. Chapters 2 and 6 will furnish some of the material for this section. In addition I will review the experiences of some Bible personalities who expressed grief when they lost their loved ones. I will highlight the fact that their mourning seems to have been viewed as normal in the Bible accounts. I will also point out that the Jews had their cultural ways of demonstrating grief. These included tearing of their garments and wearing of sackcloth (Gen 37:34). I will also use some quotations from the writings of Ellen G. White and her personal encounters with grief at the loss of her husband and two sons.

The third unit will acquaint pastors and elders with the grieving process. Discussion will begin with the uniqueness of each person's grief experience. The variables that affect grief will be discussed. These include the relationship to the deceased and the circumstances of death. I will mention anticipatory grief as a factor in prolonged terminal illness. However, to save time, I will hand out to the pastors the section on anticipatory grief in chapter 5 of this dissertation. I will refer to the stages of grief and caution that they are a guideline that should not be applied rigidly. I will also acquaint them with Tatelbaum's scheme of the grief process that is included in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

The fourth unit of the training program will help the pastors to see that the cultural landscape of Zimbabwe is changing due to urbanization, Western influences, and AIDS. In this discussion I will refer to some material in chapter 3 of this dissertation. A portion of the movie *Neria* will be shown and pastors will discuss the cultural changes that are depicted in the movie. They will also discuss shifts that have been taking place since the movie was produced. I will ask pastors to suggest ways to adjust to the new trends in society. The idea of support groups will be recommended as one way to respond. Pastors will also be asked to consider *nyaradzo* and to develop a model that is acceptable to them and to the membership in Zimbabwe.

The fifth unit will discuss how pastors can develop a meaningful funeral ministry. In this segment the preparation and conducting of the funeral will be discussed. I will discuss with the pastors the function of the funeral as suggested by Paul E. Irion. The function of the funeral should determine the form of its various segments, including the music and sermon. I will also highlight the importance of pre-funeral and post-funeral ministries. The discussion in this unit is based on chapter 6. The sections on death notification and the funeral sermon will be handed out to participants to read as assignments and to give their reactions at the beginning of the next training session.

The sixth unit will introduce the idea of support groups and train the pastors how to conduct them. In this unit I will highlight the importance of introducing this idea to Zimbabwe because of the social trends that have diminished community and family support. Pastors will be instructed on the importance of listening and encouraging the participants to share their experiences. I will review with them the worksheets that

constitute Appendix B. These worksheets will be used to guide the discussion and sharing by participants in the ensuing support group program. During training, pastors and elders will formulate a support group.

Evaluation of the Program

The pastors and elders who will attend the pilot training program will have an opportunity to evaluate it. An evaluation form is included in Appendix C. The areas of evaluation will include the material used, the trainer, the amount of time allocated for discussion, the convenience of the training location, and the facilities. The form will have a space for suggesting improvements to the training program. The recommendations from these evaluations will be incorporated into the next training program.

Besides the evaluation form, pastors who attend will be invited to discuss with me any suggestions that they may have to improve the program and to make it more relevant. If, in the course of this training program and its evaluation, individuals are identified who could help to make the program more effective, they will be invited to help to adjust the program and to assist in running subsequent training events.

During the training program pastors will be encouraged to use an evaluation form to assess the grief support programs in their churches. A sample of this form is in Appendix C. Pastors will be asked to respond to the outcome of these evaluation exercises by adapting the support groups. They will also be asked to share these evaluations with me so that, if necessary, I can make changes to the training program to meet the needs that are reflected.

Another way to evaluate the program is to discover if it has a positive effect on the participants. The comments of participants after the program has run its course will indicate if the program has some benefits. Periodically pastors will be asked to give some feedback on whether the program is meeting the needs of the bereaved. The comments from their members will indicate if the program needs adjustments. Another way to assess the program is by the number of participants who will continue to attend any given program. A high dropout rate may indicate that the program is not meeting felt needs. Facilitators will be asked to record the number in attendance at each session and this will serve as a measurement of success. Likewise the number of participants in subsequent support group events will also serve as an indicator of the relevance of the program.

It is also important to assess the effectiveness of the program in winning new members to join the church. While the purpose of grief ministry is to support the bereaved, the program should fit into the total program of the church to make disciples and to baptize them. I will want to determine if there are non-Adventists who participated in support groups and whether they subsequently attended other church programs. This evaluation will not determine whether or not to continue to run the program. Instead it will be used to find ways to reach out to non-Adventist participants with our message.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary and Conclusions

Grief is a universal and timeless reaction to bereavement. The Bible recognizes its legitimacy. Many Bible personalities, who feared God, displayed grief when a loved one died. Their grief was not a denial of their faith in God. This should not be surprising because death was not a part of God's plan from the beginning. It is an intruder which came onto the scene in the wake of sin. Death is just as out of place as sin in God's universe, therefore He will eradicate them both at the time when He restores all things. Death will be the last enemy to be destroyed. God's children are therefore not amiss when they grieve the loss of their loved ones.

Through His Word, God has revealed enough information about what happens to people when they die. They are in a state of unconsciousness, awaiting the resurrection. However, Satan has introduced the teaching of the immortality of the soul as a counterfeit. This teaching has found its way even into the Christian Church. Adventists reject this teaching because, as it is taught in Christian circles, it reflects Greek philosophy rather than Scripture. The Zimbabwean community has its own version of the immortality of the soul. This belief arises from African traditional religion. The belief is

reflected in the funerary rites as well as other aspects of life.

God has also revealed to us that through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus, death is a defeated enemy. Its fate is the same as that of Satan who is its author. Both Satan and death will be cast into the lake of fire at the final destruction. At that time believers will enjoy life without end. The coming of Jesus, which ushers in eternal life, is the blessed hope that circumscribes the grief of believers.

Until the coming of Jesus, believers, like everyone else, will continue to suffer the loss of their loved ones. The only way to deal with their loss is to face grief squarely and to go through it. This is the example that we find in Scripture. Facing grief squarely is also the solution that social sciences offer for dealing with loss. Any attempt to circumvent grief is not only futile, it can result in future emotional complications.

Besides the comfort of knowing that Satan and death will be destroyed and eternal life will be the heritage of the believers, God also comforts us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Believers who allow Him to work in their hearts during their grief will experience His comforting presence.

In many situations God works through the agency of human beings. In grief situations He has ordained that believers should comfort one another by upholding the teaching of the resurrection. They also comfort one another by the ministry of presence and listening. Thus, when the community of faith comes together in the name of Jesus to support a grieving fellow believer, they are the human agents of the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Because of the high mortality rate in Zimbabwe, cultural support systems have

been eroding. It is therefore necessary that the community of faith attempts to fill the gap that is created by waning family support systems. The church should provide for the support of its own members through the ministry of the pastor as well as the members of the congregation. The church should also take note that by ministering to nonmembers they will cultivate relationships that can result in baptisms in the future.

One way to provide support is for the church to introduce support groups. Effective support groups are efficient ways to minister to the bereaved. They also give members who have resolved their own grief an opportunity to serve others. Such a ministry is not only a way to give back to the community that supported them in their time of need, it also fills the need of many to be involved in a ministry that is associated with their loss. It is a way to begin to focus on the future and also to gain a sense of control and purpose in the aftermath of loss.

In ministering to the bereaved, the church should recognize the findings of modern social sciences. Those who engage in this ministry should make every effort to understand the grief process. Modern research sometimes validates social practices but sometimes it challenges them. We should, therefore, continue to study the findings of modern research and find ways of ministering to the bereaved.

We should also remember that cultural practices provided a framework of support during grief. Many of the cultural rites, good and bad, assisted the mourners to face grief and to express it. Thus when the church confronts culture with the gospel it needs, first, to ascertain what aspects of culture are immoral and which are innocent. The church should also recognize that some practices, though unbiblical, have some benefits. Thus when the

church dissuades members from these rites it should fill the gap.

It is not necessary to try to find a substitute for each and every rite or ceremony that is discarded. To attempt to do that may lead to cultural contraptions that do not make sense. Joseph Kumbirai's model of *nyaradzo* (the consolation service), discussed in chapter 4, is an example of this. His attempt to mirror *kurova guva* (canonizing the spirit) results in no real confrontation of unbiblical practices.[1] What is important is to provide a vibrant bereavement ministry that also makes cultural sense. Such a ministry will also fill the gap that is left when members are ostracized by their families because of their faith.

We should make a studied ongoing effort to improve our funeral ministry. I have suggested that the design of the funeral should reflect the function. I have also made suggestions on both pre-funeral and post-funeral ministry. Because the Adventist pastor in Zimbabwe cannot do all these things because of the size of the parishes, he or she should use surrogates to accomplish this ministry.

The training program that I have outlined is a beginning. It will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the church and the community. It is my hope that this program will be effective, not only in providing support for the bereaved, but in also revealing to them the compassion and love of God as communicated by the community of faith. The ultimate purpose of this program will be to glorify God through this kind of support and to win people into His kingdom.

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[1]The concept of *nyaradzo* in itself was a great innovation that I recommend to the Adventist Church. See the discussion in chapter 4.

Recommendations

I recommend that the Zimbabwe Union Conference and its constituent Conferences should support this program. Support would be demonstrated by making opportunities available for pastors and members to participate in the training program. The church, at the various levels, could also provide funding for the equipment and material to make this a viable program. For efficiency, some equipment and resources may have to be shared from strategic centers. Conferences already have some equipment that they loan out to churches or districts through the pastors for evangelism. Because the grief support will make additional demands on the equipment that is currently available, it will be necessary to procure more and make it available under similar arrangements.

Another way that the Union and its constituent Conferences would demonstrate support is through sponsoring professional grief seminars. In these seminars pastors and other professionals would present papers and participate in discussions on grief ministry, cultural practice, and other related topics. These seminars would help pastors to improve their ministry to the bereaved. Professional grief seminars could be a good forum to develop ways to engage children in grief recovery.[1]

I also recommend that Solusi University consider the possibility of developing a course in bereavement ministry for its pastors in training. This course could also include a component in working with terminally ill people and their families. This would expose pastors to the needs in this area of ministry.

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[1]In this dissertation I did not explore this theme but I recognize this as an important area of concern. In an ongoing effort to develop grief ministry, I will explore this area further in the future.

Another recommendation is for the Conferences to consider introducing classes in grief recovery at the different camp meeting sites. Conferences already do a great job in providing lessons on other areas, such as healthful living, personal financial management, and family life. Adding this component to their program will be easy to do.

A final recommendation is for the church in Zimbabwe to develop video material on grief ministry. Because such a project would need substantial investments in time and money, it is best if it could be done as a team effort. This not only makes the task manageable, it also ensures that the product reflects the views of many people. It may also motivate pastors to participate in this ministry if they have contributed to its development. To prevent the cost of this project from becoming prohibitive, this endeavor should utilize talents that are within the church.

APPENDIX A

GRIEF MINISTRY TRAINING MANUAL

INTRODUCTION TO THE GRIEF MINISTRY TRAINING MANUAL

Congratulations for choosing to participate in this Grief Ministry training program. The objective of the program is to equip you for effective grief ministry in Zimbabwe. This objective can be broken down to the following goals:

1. To help you to recognize the need for extended grief ministry by pastors and congregations.
2. To help you to identify the factors affecting culture in Zimbabwe and to adjust your ministry accordingly.
3. To enable you to understand the grief process and its uniqueness to each person.
4. To enable you to be purposeful in the pre-funeral, funeral and post-funeral ministry.
5. To acquaint you with grief support group ministry.

The training manual is comprised of two sections. The first section will be used for the pastoral training program. The second section will be used in support groups. Both sections are in the form of worksheets that will be filled in by the participants. Since pastors will be involved in facilitating support groups, they will also need to review the relevant worksheets during the training program.

The participants, in both the pastoral training program and the support groups will have worksheets that have spaces for them to fill in answers to discussion questions. The

facilitator will have a workbook that has suggested answers to the questions so that he or she will provide them in the course of discussion. The underlined sections, in the facilitator's manual indicate the blank spaces in the participants' manual. Many of the discussion questions do not have one right answer. My purpose is to encourage participants to think for themselves while guiding them in the discussion. The notes they will take will therefore not always be identical. The trainer's manual has many possible answers, therefore has extended sections underlined. This does not mean that the participants will be expected to copy all those answers. The reason for the many answers is to help the trainer to have a variety of answers available and to be able to lead the trainees on a broad range of possible answers. The purpose, particularly in the support groups is to stimulate discussion as well as to teach.

In a few places the facilitator's manual also has blank spaces. This indicates answers that apply to the individual participants. These questions may include how they will personally cope with a situation. There are also some assignments that participants will be asked to work on individually. The questions in these assignments are meant lead participants to reflect or to contemplate on a particular focus area.

This manual is intended for the pilot program. Adaptations will be made in response to the needs that become evident during evaluation. My hope is that it will be a useful tool to meet the needs of the bereaved and those who minister to them.

THE CALL TO GRIEF MINISTRY - 1 hour

Goal: To recognize the biblical mandate for grief ministry for pastors and congregations..

A. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Co 1:3, 4).

1. Why does the word "comfort" appear so many times in this sentence?

Because it is talking about God comforting us and us comforting others.

Notice also that there are two references to afflictions; our affliction in which God comforts us and the troubles of others in which we should comfort them. We reproduce to others what we have experienced from God.

2. How does God comfort me in my afflictions? Through the ministry of others.

a. Ellen G. White wrote: "We must be laborers together with God; for God will not complete His work without human agencies."[1]

b. "Through His servants, God designs that the sick, the unfortunate, and those possessed of evil spirits shall hear His voice. Through

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1947), 9.

His human agencies He desires to be a comforter such as the world knows not"[1].

c. God has ordained according to the law of ministry that we should comfort one another in tenderness and love when great sorrows come upon us. No man liveth unto himself. No one dieth unto himself. Life and death both mean something to every human being. . . . God has enjoined the duty upon His human agents to communicate the character of God, testifying to His grace, His wisdom, and His benevolence, by manifesting His refined, tender, merciful love. . . . Jesus . . . was ever touched with human woe, and our hearts should be softened and subdued by His Holy Spirit, that we may be like Him.[2]

3. What is my response to God's comforting ministry when I recover from my troubles? God expects me to replicate his comforting ministry.

4. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4 A. T. Robertson says, "Paul here gives the purpose of affliction in the preacher's life, in any Christian's life, to qualify him for ministry to others. Otherwise it will be professional and perfunctory."[3]

5. Freely you received, so freely give (Matt 10:8). God expects us to pass own his grace to others. Thus we should love others because He loved us; we forgive others because He forgave us. Likewise we comfort others because He comforted us.

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[1]Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific, 1942), 106.

[2]Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1964), 45.

[3]A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, np: Broadman ,Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, 1934, s.v. 2 Corinthians 1:3

B. Read 1 Thess 4:13-18.

1. What or who is the source of comfort in this verse? Believers comforting other believers, not doctrines, not cards, flowers, food or doctrines even though these things can be useful resources. Personal involvement is required. (notice the reciprocal phrase "one another.")

2. What is the role of the resurrection message in this passage? It is the basis of our hope, but it does not replace people. Besides the ministry of the Holy Spirit, people, not doctrines, are the primary comforters.

3. Notice that verse 18 is not instructing the pastors or elders to comfort their members, but believers to comfort one another? What bearing does this have on the role of the congregation in grief ministry? The congregation has a part to play in grief ministry. The pastor cannot do it alone, particularly now that the mortality rate is so high.

4. What roles has the church traditionally filled when someone is bereaved? Conducting (funeral) services, occasional material assistance.

5. We have been fortunate all along that the community provided extended support. Now that the community quickly disperses after the funeral, what can we do as a church to meet the needs of the grieving? We need to find ways to offer extended ministry after the funeral.

6. Can the pastor do this alone? Who else can help to perform the ministries of the church? Elders/office holders/willing members of the congregation.

7. Sunderland notes that "grief support, is possible only when using the gifts

of lay ministers."[1] What possibilities do you see for your congregation to be involved in grief ministry? What is your role as the pastor? Identify the problem, recruit willing helpers, train them and mobilize them.

C. Lessons from the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35).

1. Suggest some reasons why the priest and levite did not help? Do you think there was concern for ceremonial cleanness? Is it possible that they felt that the time spent and the possibility uncleanness would hinder them from fulfilling their responsibilities in the temple? What relevance does this have for your ministry.

2. Why did the Samaritan help? Do you think that he understood what it means to need help and not get it?

3. The Samaritan did what he could, and then handed the wounded man to someone else. What significance does this have to us in grief ministry when the task seems insurmountable? Do what you can to makes a difference. Perhaps no one else can do what you can. The Samaritan was the only one willing and able to rescue the wounded man from the scene of attack. He was also willing and able to do "First Aid" and to pay for the wounded man's upkeep at the inn. He then left him in the care of someone else who could give extended care. The Samaritan was willing to make a further financial contribution later. Likewise, the grief situation in our

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[1]Ronald H. Sunderland, *Getting Through Grief: Caregiving by Congregations*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1993, 81.

country is grim and is too much for any one person. Yet if each of us does what we can and enlist the help of others we can make a difference and together compliment each other's efforts.

Preview: In the next unit we will discuss grief and the believer. Is it a denial of faith to grieve the death of a loved one? What does the Bible say?

THE BELIEVER AND GRIEF - 1.5 hours

Goal: To demonstrate that grieving following bereavement is not a denial of faith.

Preview: In the first unit we considered the call for us as ministers and congregations to minister to those who grieve. We noticed that God wants us to replicate His ministry of comfort to others. We also discussed that even though we may not feel capable to do all that is required, we can still do what we can.

In this unit we will consider the question: "What should be reaction of believers when they lose loved ones to death?"We will begin by looking at 1 Thess 4:13.

"But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you *may not grieve as others do who have no hope*" (1 Thess 4:13). Does this verse forbid grief among believers? Let us look at some examples from the Bible.

A. Sample of the reaction of Bible personalities.

1. Adam and Eve (Gen 4:25).

   What was the significance of the name "Seth" (compensation)? Seth gave some consolation to Adam and Eve after the loss of Abel, suggesting that they had sensed a loss when Abel died.

2. Abraham (Gen 23:1, 2).

   Abraham mourned and wept for Sarah

3. Jacob

   Made a pillar in memory of Rachel (Gen 35:19, 20).

4. How did Jacob express grief when he thought Joseph had been killed by a beast (Gen 37:33-35)?

   a) Tore his clothes b) put on sackcloth c) mourned many days d) refused to be comforted.

5. Joseph

   Weeping and mourning for Jacob (Gen 50:1, 10, 11).

6. David (2 Sam 1:11, 12).

   How did David and those with him express sorrow at the death of Saul and Jonathan? Was there anything cultural about these expressions?

   a) tore their clothes b) wept c) fasted until evening.

7. David grieved the anticipated death of his infant son. (2 Sam 12:16-20).

8. David's household mourned for Amnon (2 Sam 13:33-36).

9. Read David's lament for Absalom (2 Sam 18:32-19:4) Notice how he expressed his grief by repetitious lament and loud weeping. David freely expressed his grief.

10. Jesus (John 11:35).

11. Paul would have grieved if Epaphroditus had died (Phil 2:25-27).

    Paul uses the word *lupe* in this verse for "sorrow" and *lupeo* in 1 Thess 4:13. This is the same root word, as a noun and verb, just like "grief" and "grieve."

From these Bible references what do you think Paul was teaching when he taught that believers should not grieve as those who have no hope? Paul did not forbid grief expression. However, he did not want believers to grieve in despair.

12. In the space provided copy the words of Rev 21:4 from any version.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Notice how tears and sorrow are eradicated together with (and not before) death and pain.

B Ellen White and grief - some quotations

1. "In her (Martha) disappointment and grief she had not lost confidence in Jesus, and added, 'But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it unto thee.'"[1]

2. "Poor Willie is indeed bereaved. He never is demonstrative, therefore he will mourn alone and feel it deeper. My heart is sore and sad."[2]

3. In 1860 death stepped over our threshold, and broke the youngest branch of our family tree. Little Herbert, born Sept. 20, 1860, died December 14 of the same year. When that tender branch was broken, how

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God,* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998, 59.

[2]Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Material,* Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987, 678.

our hearts did bleed none may know but those who have followed their little ones of promise to the grave.

But oh, when our noble Henry died, at the age of sixteen,--when our sweet sing song,--ours was a lonely home. Both parents and the two remaining sons felt the blow most keenly. But God comforted us in our bereavements, and with faith and courage we pressed forward in the work He had given us, in bright hope of meeting our children who had been torn from us by death, in that world where sickness and death will never come.[1]

4. In a letter to a widow Ellen G. White writes:

> We sympathize with you in your bereavement and widowhood. I have passed over the ground that you are now traveling, and know what it means. How much sorrow there is in our world! How much grief! How much weeping! It is not right to say to the bereaved ones, "Do not weep; it is not right to weep." Such words have little consolation in them. There is no sin in weeping.[2]

5. To a grieving family she wrote:

> Like Job, you felt that you had cause for grief, and would not be comforted. Was this reasonable? You know that death is a power that none can resist; but you have made your lives nearly useless by your unavailing grief. Your feelings have been little less than rebellion against God. I saw you all dwelling upon your bereavement, and giving way to your excitable feelings, until your noisy demonstrations of grief caused angels to hide their faces and withdraw from the scene.[3]

6. How can you reconcile these two apparently contradicting messages in number 5 and 6? <u>Grief is legitimate, but it is possible to indulge in self pity and to prolong grief beyond reasonable limits.</u> Notice the words ". . . (you) would not be comforted" and ". . . dwelling upon your bereavement .

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943, 165, 166.

[2]Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Vol. 2, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958, 264

[3]Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church,* Vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific, 1948), 313.

. ." in the second letter. Notice also that the recipient of the second letter had made their lives nearly useless.

C. In the space below write down your own understanding of what Paul is saying in 1 Thess 4:13.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Assignment: Please read the article entitled "Delivering a Death Message[1]." As you read it plan to share with the group what has worked for you in delivering a death message.

Preview: In the next unit we will discuss the grief process. We will see why each grief experience is unique and yet also see some common emotions, and phases that people go through. Please read the handout on delivering a death message and come prepared to share any other ideas you have found useful.

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[1]This is taken from Chapter VI of this dissertation.

THE GRIEF PROCESS - 1.5hours

Objective: To understand the grief process and its uniqueness to each person.

Review: In the last unit we saw that it is not a denial of faith when believers grieve. We discussed the grief experiences of some Bible luminaries. We also looked at some grief experiences from Ellen White's life as well as some letters she wrote to grieving people.

In this unit we will discuss the grief process, its uniqueness to each person and the patterns that may be common to most bereavement situations. Before getting into this discussion, let us briefly talk about delivering a death message. What has worked for you?

A. Grief is a unique experience for each person.

1. Two siblings lose a member of the family. What could account for differences in grief? Age, level of dependence, uniqueness of each relationship, individual personalities and life situations.

2. Temperaments affects the way we grieve. -"Poor Willie is indeed bereaved. He never is demonstrative, therefore he will mourn alone and feel it deeper. My heart is sore and sad."[1]

3. Share with the group your experiences with sudden death and death after a long illness. Was there a difference in the two experiences? The sudden

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[1]*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate,1987, 678.

death heightens the shock and denial may be more likely. Prolonged illness many bring a sense of relief and some people feel guilty over that. Was any of them any less painful? No one should dictate to another what to feel.

B. Stages of Grief

1. Stages are useful but do not follow them rigidly. They are a guide, but some stages may be out of sequence or even absent.

2. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' stages: 1. denial 2. anger 3. bargaining 4. depression 5. acceptance

3. Tatelbaum's stages (an alternative model): a. Shock and numbness b. Suffering and disorganization c. Reorganization

a. Shock and Numbness

i. feelings of disbelief, vague sense of reality

ii. emotional anaesthesia to the pain

iii. helps us to cope with funeral activities

The most appropriate help is intervention and support. Intervention is what you do to relieve them from daily chores as well as those that relate to funeral preparation. You support by being present, by listening to them and encouraging grief expression.

b. Suffering and disorganization

i. The anesthesia is depleted, community support is gone, and the routine must resume.

ii. Most painful part of grief, with emotions such as sadness, depression, loneliness, guilt, anger etc.

iii. changes in sleep patterns, eating habits, sexual drive, energy levels, self esteem.

iv. Some triggers for pain include, holidays, anniversaries, occasions associated with the deceased, etc.

The mourner continues to need support. Create time to visit, a day or two after the funeral, and again week later. Remember them on special days or occasions.

How can the church continue to minister to so many people for so long and yet not ignore other ministries? One way is through the introduction of grief support groups. Let the members of the congregation participate in comforting others (2 Co 1:3,4).

c. Reorganization phase

ii. When the deceased is no longer the primary focus of your life

iii. restoration of sleep patterns, eating habits etc.

iv. Focus on the future

Help the bereaved to invest in a ministry that is associated with their loss. This helps them to reorganize their life and to find meaning. Some ideas are support group ministry, involvement in AIDS prevention, Continue the cycle of replicating ministry.

C. Write in your own words the lesson that you get from 2 Co 1:3, 4. We are to

impart on to others the comfort we received from God and the community of faith.

Preview: In the next unit we will discuss some factors that have changed our culture and how we can adapt our ministry to accommodate the shifts.

GRIEF AND THE CHANGING FACE OF ZIMBABWE - 1.5 hours

Goal: To identify the factors affecting culture in Zimbabwe and to adjust ministry accordingly.

Review: In the last unit we reviewed the grief process. We saw that grief has some common elements to us all, yet each grief experience is unique. We looked at two schemes of understanding the grief process.

In this unit we will discuss how the changes in our culture are affecting grief.

(This unit begins with video clips from the movie *Neria* in which the funeral and inheritance rites are shown followed by the group activity below).

A. Group Activity (10 Minutes)

1. Imagine that you were Neria's pastor. In what ways could you employ the resources of the local congregation to support her emotionally?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Are there other areas of her life that you and the church family can support?

_____

_____

_____

B. What changes do we see in our culture as reflected in *Neria*?

The family is scattered because of urbanization and the search for "greener pastures." The need for money in more and more aspects of funerary rites.

C. What changes have occurred since the movie was made?

The rise in mortality rate due to AIDS. The economy has collapsed.. Expedited funerals.

D. How do these changes affect the funeral and way we deal with bereavement?

1. The family and the community quickly depart to attend to their own livelihood.

2. Deaths in quick succession results in unresolved grief.

These changes are leaving a gap that the church should try to fill by ongoing ministry to the bereaved.

B. What is the value of symbols such as the *kubata maoko* (the handshake) black dress, throwing soil into the grave?

There are cultural forms of expressing grief and offering condolences. The Jews tore their clothes and wore sackcloth. Symbolism often helps us to express what we cannot put into words.

C. What is the value of the presence of relatives and the community. Is the presence of people ever a liability?

The presence of the community is a demonstration of support. Grief has a social dimension to it. The bereaved need the presence of other supportive people from time to time. However, the bereaved may at times wish for solitude or to be just in the company

of a few select individuals. While joys shared are increased, grief shared is cut down to a manageable size.

D. Read Deut 14:1 and Gen 37:34. The practices in both verses seem to have been part of the culture of the ancient Near East. Why were some (cutting self and cutting off certain portions of the hair) condemned and yet the others (tearing clothes and wearing sackcloth) condoned? Can it be that God forbids self-mutilation because the body belongs to Him (1 Co 6:19). Is it also possible that he condemned the cutting of hair because it was associated with paganism, hence the reason for the prohibition was that Israel belonged to God. We can apply these as guidelines in appraising our own culture. Are there any cultural rites that are harmful? Are there any rites that imply association with paganism or spiritism?

E. List some practices that you would consider to be unbiblical.

a. Circuiting the house with the corpse before proceeding to the grave b. "Resting" the deceased on the way to the grave c. Any practice that includes communicating with the deceased.

F. Some cultural ceremonies that took place weeks or months after burial brought the family together and allowing them to reminisce on the deceased. However, our theology makes many of these practices untenable. List some of these ceremonies

a. Divining the cause of death b. Canonizing the Spirit

G. What is the best time for the pastor to address unbiblical practices?

1. We can best address these issues outside the immediate bereavement experience, as part of ongoing teaching ministry such as in baptismal

classes, during Sabbath afternoon discussions, quarterly/camp meeting lessons, etc.

2. We can also try to negotiate with the unbelieving family members before the funeral.

3. Ordering people to stop rituals that are already in progress is not ministry; it is an attempt to control. We are not responsible for what the family chooses to do. Public protests are not effective in changing peoples views, and are unprofessional.

H. What efforts should we make to fill the gap that is left when unbiblical practices are discarded? *Nyaradzo*, Support groups, services that focus on bereaved members etc.

I. What experiences have you had with *nyaradzo?* Suggest a name and model of *nyaradzo* ceremony.

One suggestion would be to have quarterly weekend programs that focus on bereaved families. The program could be conducted at a place other than the church to avoid disrupting other church programs, if such an arrangement is needed. However, where possible this program should be incorporated into the program of the whole church so that the whole body lends their support to grieving members.

J. The inheritance ceremony is an example of a practice that can be transformed by the gospel. In what ways can it be transformed? Discuss any other practices that may fall into this category.

Inheritance is common to many cultures and it meets practical as well as emotional needs. Our culture needs to recognize the needs and the rights of the spouse and dependants of the deceased to the estate. Other relatives can receive appropriate items as keepsakes.

K. Ellen White wrote:

> Propriety of deportment is at all times to be observed; wherever principle is not compromised, consideration of others will lead to compliance with accepted customs; but true courtesy requires no sacrifice of principle to conventionality.[1]

L. Identify some cultural practices that do not contradict the Bible. What are the benefits of these customs? How do you feel about members participating in these practices? _____

Preview: In the next unit we will discuss our ministry to the bereaved before, during and after the funeral.

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 426.

FUNERAL MINISTRY - 1 hour

Objective: To enable pastors to be purposeful in the pre-funeral, funeral and post-funeral ministry.

In the last unit we discussed the factors that are changing our culture and how we can respond to them. We noted that the church should try to fill the gaps that are being created by these cultural shifts.

Today we would like to focus on the funeral ministry, beginning with the visit before the funeral to the support that can be given in the days and weeks following bereavement.

The funeral ministry can be divided into three segments, pre-funeral visit, the funeral service and the post-funeral ministry.

A. Pre-funeral visit

1. What is the purpose of pre-funeral visits? Support and Funeral preparation.

2. "(The minister) has the opportunity to provide an embodiment of Christ's love in a physical, tangible way. In a time of great need, the minister becomes a visible reminder of God's presence during the hours of pain."[1]

3. One who conducts the funeral for a bereaved family has a primary responsibility to establish a personal relationship with them. The quality of that relationship is the measure of his helpfulness in the funeral. The leader of the funeral must . . . see the mourners as persons, with individual needs and feelings. They must, in turn, see the leader as a person, concerned and capable of helping them through this difficult time. Unless

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[1]Al Cadenhead, Jr., *The Minister's Manual for Funerals*, Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1988, 16.

some personal contact is possible prior to the funeral, it is all too likely that the mourners will be depersonalized and that the one conducting the funeral will appear as an anonymous specialist.[1]

4. Listen to the person speak; you have not gone primarily to say something. You have gone to be with the person and to support. Listening tends to give more support than words. "Grief is an emotion. Words tend to be intellectualizations."[2]

5. When planning the funeral, involve the bereaved in planning and participation in the program if they wish.

   a. Involve them in choosing time, venue, content of the program and participants.

   b. Let them participate in readings, music, obituary, poetry, testimony, etc. "Participation allows symbolic mastery, often so important in the chaos that loss brings.[3]"

B. The Funeral Service

1. Speaking of the funeral Paul E. Irion says, "Form Follows Function.

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[1]Paul E. Irion, *A Guide for Those who Conduct A Humanist Funeral Service*, Baltimore: Waverly, 1971, 7

[2]Edgar N. Jackson, An Accidental Death: Don't be Afraid of Silence, in *What Helped Me When My Loved One Died,* ed Earl A. Grollman, Boston: Beacon, 1981, 51.

[3]Kenneth J. Doka, The Spiritual Crisis of Bereavement in *Death and Spirituality,* Ed Kenneth J. Doka with John D. Morgan, Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1993, 187.

Design must, therefore, be related to usefulness and efficiency."[1]

2. Functions of the funeral

a. Provides support for mourners.

i. Irion observes that religious belief can be a support in mourning.[2]

ii What are some ways that Christianity gives such support? God's care, presence strength and love.

ii Some ways to demonstrate support: attendance, thoughtful actions, listening and allowing them to tell their story.

Schedule funerals with the community, friends and relatives in mind so that maximum support will be possible.

iv This should be balanced with the need to expedite funerals in the current situation in Zimbabwe.

b. Reinforcing the reality of death.

i. Factors that reinforce reality of death: seeing the grave, presence of the coffin, watching the burial process, etc.

ii. Is there anything we can do to further reinforce the reality of death? Encourage body viewing, mention the deceased by name, encourage participation in throwing in a handful

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[1]Paul E. Irion, The Funeral and the Bereaved in *Resources for Ministry in Death and Dying,* 212.

[2]Ibid., 212.

of soil, etc

c. Make possible the expression of the mourners feelings.

i. Feelings may be verbalized or acted out. Weeping, talking about loss, black attire, shaving hair, singing and dancing etc.

ii Involve the bereaved in the program in life sketch, testimony, music, scripture reading etc.

ii Show the mourners that grief expression is legitimate by sharing your own grief story.

d. Making a fitting conclusion to the life of the deceased.

i. What is the difference between dignity and extravagance. It is possible to have dignity without lavish spending.

ii Some ways to enhance dignity: Adequate preparation (all participants to be prepared), avoiding the appearance of being hurried, creative use of music and scripture reading.

ii Cite the significance and contributions of the deceased to community to family or other individuals.

e. Inspiring hope.

i. The hope of the resurrection (1Thess 4:13-18).

ii Present God as a loving father.

C. The Post-funeral ministry

1. Why should we be involved in post-funeral ministry?

a. To avoid the appearance of perfunctory professionalism.

b. Merely to conduct the funeral service and to pay no further attention to the bereaved is sheer professionalism in the worst sense of the word. It can easily degenerate into a sort of sophisticated witch doctoring, where the pastor is called in 'to say a few words' over the body, to appease the spirits, and then picks up the sack of meal which is his due and goes home.[1]

c. The anesthesia of shock often wears off after the funeral and the bereaved experience the full pain of their loss. Unfortunately, at this time much of the community support has evaporated.

d. Post-funeral ministry can be very productive because the busyness of the funeral is over so interaction can be more focused.

2. Visit a day or two later, a week or two after, remember special days and occasions. (Use surrogates to make this possible.)

3. Are there other forms of ministry, other than visiting the bereaved, that would be appropriate and effective? *Nyaradzo* or special services focusing on those recently bereaved, support group ministry.

Assignment: Read the article *The Funeral Sermon.*[2] What other ideas have you found useful in preparing and presenting funeral sermons. Be prepared to share with the group at the next session.

Preview: In the next unit we will discuss the concept of support group. Support groups have helped many individuals when they meet with others who

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[1]Paul E. Irion, *The Funeral and the Mourner,* Nashville: Abingdon, 1954, 161.

[2]This is taken from Chapter VI of this dissertation.

have similar situations. They are a possible solution to our predicament.

SUPPORT GROUPS -1 hour

Goal: To acquaint you with grief support group ministry.

Review: In the last unit we discussed that our ministry before, during and after the funeral should be purposeful. We discussed the *nyaradzo* and support groups as a possible solutions.

In this unit let us examine the idea of support groups and try to adapt it to our situation.

A. Why do we need support groups? Community support for the bereaved is waning in the Zimbabwe.

B. Support groups have been used elsewhere to cater for similar situations and we can adopt them to meet our own need.

C. Definition: A support group is a group of people in a similar situation who meet to give each other support as they tackle their problem. Support is viewed as a combination of words, silent attention, personal disclosure and empathy. Support groups enlarge the social network of members.[1]

D. Support group members support each other by sharing their stories, learning from each other, and knowing that they are not alone in their problem.

E. The efficiency of support groups is that the bereaved themselves are each others' support. They come together and by sharing their own experiences they uplift one

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[1]Adapted from Linda Farris Kurtz, *Self Help and Support Group: A Handbook for Practitioners* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 21.

another and share one another's burdens with the assistance of a facilitator.

F. Some useful skills in facilitating support groups

1. Building rapport

   a. Greeting them when they come in and engaging them in a conversation.

   b. Remembering their names and using them often.

   c. Demonstrating attending behavior: Facing the person, Maintaining an open posture, Appropriate eye contact, Avoiding being distracted,

2. Listening

   a. Listen to the content of what they are saying

   b. Listen to feelings: how they say it - tone and volume of voice, facial expression, other body language.

   c. Examples of active listening (um-m, nodding etc)

   d. Paraphrasing - restating what has been said in your own words

   e. reflection - responding to speaker in a way that shows you understand what is being said and its significance.

3. Empathy: The ability to feel with another their feelings.

4. Use of open ended questions: Questions that will lead the person to give more than a one word or one sentence answer. An example of an open ended question is "What is your experience with loneliness?" rather than "Have you ever experienced loneliness?"

5. Understanding the grief process.

F. The Rights of Participants

1. Not to share their experience. (Do not ask participants to speak in predetermined sequence, e.g. by rows. Let sharing be voluntary. Participants might feel more inclined to discuss feelings if the discussion is in the third person).

2. Not to do assignments.

3. To experience their grief in their own way. (No one should suggest that the feelings of another is wrong.)

4. To express grief. (The others should be supportive, not discourage grief expression).

5. To be treated respectfully by facilitators and other participants

H. Suggested format for the first meeting

Welcome[1]

Devotional message[2]

Ground rules[3]

Discussion

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[1]See *Creating a Feeling of Acceptance* and *Suggested Welcome* in this Appendix.

[2]The purpose of beginning support group sessions with a devotional message is to enable the participants to continue to focus on the presence, the care and love of God. Devotions will also help them to continue to focus on the hope of the resurrection. Devotional message could as short as reading a Psalm or a passage from a devotional book.

[3]See *Ground Rules* in the Grief Support Group Workbook.

Preview next session and assignment

Prayer

Snacks

I. Suggested format of subsequent meeting

Welcome the participants back

Devotional message

Review what happened the previous session

Sharing of assignment outcome by volunteers

Discussion

Preview next session and assignment

Prayer

Snacks

J. Other than meeting formally in group sessions participants should be encouraged to contact one another and to support each other. Some ways to support each other outside the formal group meeting include pooling rides/resources, eating together, assisting one another, socializing, prayer, etc.

Preview: In the next unit we will look at some worksheets that have been prepared for use in support groups.

REVIEW OF SUPPORT GROUP WORKSHEETS[1]

Goal: To acquaint the pastors with grief support group ministry in preparation for upcoming grief support group program.

Assignment

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-11.

Think about a time when you had to plan a wedding, trip or any other event with another person. What were the drawbacks and what were the advantages? What does this tell you about co-leading a support group with another person.

_____

_____

What role will each of the co-facilitators play?

_____

_____

Creating a Feeling of Acceptance.

When people decide to be participants in a grief support group it is because they are hurting from their loss. Well-meaning friends may have said some platitudes that were not particularly helpful if not unkind. The facilitator can expect that when some of these people come for the first meeting they are wary about exposing themselves to a

[1]Support group worksheets are in the appendix.

painful situation. It is critical that the first session should allay their fears. Larry Yeagley recommends that support group facilitators personally greet participants as they come in and engage them in one on one conversation.[1] This will help to create a warm climate that will encourage openness and help the participants to feel that the facilitator cares about them as persons.

To further set their minds at ease, Yeagley's opening remarks spell out that the participants will not be asked to speak or do anything against their wish. Anything they will participate in, including assignments, will be voluntary. If they start speaking and in the process feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed, it is alright to stop. Yeagley also draws the participants attention to facial tissue provided for them, emphasizing to them that crying is acceptable. He also assures them that he will not be judgmental and that he will not do anything to intentionally hurt them.[2]

It would also be appropriate at this time to offer participants an opportunity to introduce themselves to the group. They could say their names and a tell the group a little bit about themselves. The facilitators could model this by introducing themselves. They could relate briefly about a loss that they have experienced in the not-so-distant past and the blessings they received from participation in a grief support group. When they ask participants to introduce themselves they should be ensure that no one feels pressured to introduce himself or herself. The self-introduction will therefore not follow any predictable sequence, like going through a row. This will allow those who would like to

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[1]Larry Yeagley, *Conducting Grief Support Groups*, Self Published, 1994, 46.

[2]Ibid., 46, 47.

opt out to do so gracefully. Since participation will remain voluntary throughout the duration of the group, facilitators will try to ensure that when people take turns to do anything, it is not setting a predictable pattern.

Below is a suggested welcome. Adapt it to your needs but make sure that you convey the same sentiments.

Suggested Welcome

Good evening. My name is _____. I am not a professional counselor. I am not an expert in managing grief. In the last _____ months I lost a _____ to death. Through my grief I have received a lot of support from people I met in a group similar to what we have here today. As I have been blessed by God through the support of others I would also like to extend the same blessing to others as much as I can. I hope that our meeting together over the next few weeks will be a blessing to you, help you to deal with the pain that you are going through and will be an opportunity to meet and share with others who are also going through the pain of grief.

I have already said that I am not a professional. I am just like any other person in this room. Professional counselors are great and they can help when we have difficulties getting over some issues, but for most of our situations we just need one another to "bear each others'"(Gal 6:2). My role is to make it possible for us to share with one another the burdens we are carrying and make it possible for us to help each other to cope. We will have some group discussions covering some topics that relate to bereavement and grief. We will have some reading material that we can read at home. And above all you will

share your experiences with the others if you so choose.

Let me mention from the beginning that you will not have to say or do anything against your wish. You will only share with others or complete an assignment if you are willing to do it. I believe that the activities that we will do are helpful but no one will pressure you into doing them. If anyone has a need to be excluded from a part of these activities, or needs to step outside to be alone for a while, it is alright. Occasionally in groups like this one, participants may find tears flowing. Please do not feel that it is out of place and do not try to suppress it or try to make others hold back their tears. Tears "wash out" tension, they are not bad.

I would like to suggest some goals for our meetings together.

1. To learn from the presentations and from our discussion some ways to cope with grief.
2. To find comfort and support from others who are going through similar experiences.
3. To find comfort and hope from God's word.

In each session we will begin with a short devotional message. Then we will review assignments that we will have done in the past week, if we had any. Today, because we do not have any assignment to discuss we will have the opportunity to introduce ourselves. After reviewing the assignments we will go into the presentation/discussion for that day. After that we will have an assignment for the next week. We would like to close with a theme song and a season of prayer. We will have snacks, for those who would like, at the close of each session.

APPENDIX B

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP WORKBOOK

WELCOME

Welcome to the grief support group. The objective of this program is to help you and others who have lost a loved one to spend time together and to support one another. This objective can be broken down into the following goals:

1. To identify some grief emotions and learn to how to cope.
2. To encourage grief expression.
3. To experience supportive fellowship with others facing similar experiences.
4. To reinvest your life in appropriate ministry to others.

You will have opportunities to share your experiences, to listen to others and to explore ways cope with your pain. You will also have the opportunity to seek God in prayer with others.

Participation in discussions and other activities is voluntary. You should not feel pressured to do anything. However, your participation will not only be a blessing to you, but to others in the group.

May God help you to find comfort in this difficult time.

GROUND RULES[1]

1. Keep confidentiality.

2 Respect other participants - Give them a chance to share without interruption

3. Limit sharing to allocated time to give other a chance to share.

4. Pay attention to others.

5. Regular and punctual attendance is encouraged.

6. Be considerate to other people and their feelings.

7. Do not pressure anyone to speak or do anything if they are not willing to do it.

8. Do not try to advise, correct or try to teach others. You may share what you did.

9. Stay on the subject.

10. Avoid inappropriate or graphic details.

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[1]Adapted from Linda Ross and Sandy Kline, *Serendipity Support and Recovery Group Training Manual* (Littleton, CO.: Serendipity, 1992), 32.

EMOTIONS OF GRIEF.

Goal: To encourage participants to identify and express grief emotions.

1. Grief is a normal reaction to all loss. Some losses are more significant than others and therefore our grief reaction varies in intensity.
2. Each grief experience is unique. No two people grieve identically. The same individual reacts differently to different losses. Each day may bring its own challenges; no two days are alike.
3. What are some emotions that are normally associated with grief. (Sadness, confusion, loneliness, anxiety, anger, depression, fear, guilt, etc). Identify the ones that you experienced the most and if you are willing, share with the group.
4. Some have identified the stages of grief as a. denial b. anger c. bargaining, d. depression e. acceptance. While this scheme helps us to anticipate what may happen in grief, it is by no means standard for everyone. Actual grief is chaotic and we should not feel that we have passed this stage and approaching that one.
5. Another scheme to try describe post bereavement experience is a. shock or numbness, b. suffering and disorganization c. reorganization.[1]
6. We cannot recover from grief by avoiding it. (A culturally understood analogy of an abscess that will not heal unless it is squeezed out).

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[1]Judy Tatelbaum, *The Courage to Grieve: Creative Living, Recovery, and Growth Through Grief* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 25-47.

7. What are some ways that we use to avoid grief?

   Drinking, avoiding talking about our loss, consistently staying busy to avoid painful thoughts or reflection, avoiding any situation that reminds me of the loss.

8. The opposite extreme is not helpful either, i.e. deliberately subjecting myself to pain is not necessary therapeutic, just as opening up a healing wound is not helpful.

9. Our meetings in the next few weeks are meant to help us to confront our grief and to take advantage of the support of other grieving people as we progress on our road to recovery.

Assignment and preview of next week's discussion: Please read the letter that Ellen White wrote to Sister Chapman. You will have an opportunity to share your thoughts about this letter for a few minutes next week.. Our discussion next week will be about coping with loneliness. Please come and share with others what has been working for you.

Assignment: Read the letter below, by Ellen G. White (written to sister Chapman, an old friend in the faith, at the time of her life companion's death).

> Dear Sister Chapman:
> I think of you every day and sympathize with you. What can I say to you in this, the greatest sorrow that has come to you in your life? Words fail me at this time. I can only commend you to God and to a compassionate Saviour. In Him is rest and peace. From Him you may receive your consolation. Jesus loves and pities as we have no power to do. Jesus Christ Himself does sustain you; His everlasting arms are beneath, His words can heal. We cannot possibly penetrate into the secret councils of God. The disappointments and distress and perplexities, the bereavements we meet, are not to drive us from God but bring us nearer to Him.

How we pant and are weary and agonized in carrying ourselves and our burden! When we come to Jesus, feeling unable to bear these loads one instant longer, and lay them upon the Burden-bearer, rest and peace will come. We do go stumbling along under our heavy loads, making ourselves miserable every day because we do not take to our hearts the gracious promises of God. He will accept us, all unworthy, through Jesus Christ. Never let us lose sight of the promise that Jesus loves us. His grace is waiting our demand upon it.

My dear afflicted sister, I know by experience what you are passing through. I have been going over the road with you that I have so recently traveled. Come near, my dear sister, to Christ the Mighty Healer. Jesus' love to us does not come in some wonderful way. This wonderful manner of His love was evidenced at His crucifixion, and the light of His love is reflected in bright beams from the cross of Calvary. Now it remains for us to accept that love, to appropriate the promises of God to ourselves.

Just repose in Jesus. Rest in Him as a tired child rests in the arms of its mother. The Lord pities you. He loves you. The Lord's arms are beneath you. You have not reined yourself up to feel and to hear; but wounded and bruised, just repose trust in God. A compassionate hand is stretched out to bind up your wounds. He will be more precious to your soul than the choicest friend, and all that can be desired is not comparable to Him. Only believe Him; only trust Him. Your friend in affliction--one who knows.[1]--Letter 1e, 1882.

What do you think Sister Chapman felt when she received this letter?

_____

_____

If you had written this letter, or a similar one, to another person, how would you feel?

How would it impact your own grief?

_____

_____

What makes E. G. White's words especially comforting? Consider paragraph 3. What

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998), 220, 221.

possibilities does this open for you?

_____

_____

LONELINESS

Goal: To help participants to accept that loneliness is a normal grief reaction and to find ways to cope.

Review: Last week we discussed some emotions that we encounter when we grieve. We noticed how some people have tried to arrange them into stages or phases. You will also remember that we discussed that grief is unique to each person.

This week we will talk about a common emotion that grieving people experience: loneliness, the feeling of being deprived of meaningful relationships.

1. Loneliness is a natural grief reaction
   a. From missing the deceased person.
   b. From feeling that no one understands.
   c. Difficulty of rejoining former circle of friends due to changed status.
2. Looking back to the time since your loss, identify the times or the settings when you feel lonely.

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3. Are there significant friends whom you are no longer spending much time with?

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4. Is there a reason why you are no longer spending time with them? Do they know of your loneliness?

5. What steps can you do to let them know you need them?

Remember that most of your friends may not be deliberately avoiding you, they may just not know how to relate to you at this time.

6. Read the following passage from Desire of Ages.

> "Bearing the weakness of humanity, and burdened with its sorrow and sin, Jesus walked **alone in the midst of men.** As the darkness of the coming trial pressed upon Him, He was in **loneliness** of spirit, in a world that knew Him not. Even His loved disciples, absorbed in their own doubt and sorrow and ambitious hopes, had not comprehended the mystery of His mission. He had dwelt amid the love and fellowship of heaven; but in the world that He had created, He was in **solitude**. Now heaven had sent its messengers to Jesus; not angels, but men who had endured suffering and sorrow, and who could sympathize with the Saviour in the trial of His earthly life. Moses and Elijah had been colaborers with Christ. They had shared His longing for the salvation of men. Moses had pleaded for Israel: "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." Ex. 32:32. **Elijah had known loneliness of spirit**, as for three years and a half of famine he had borne the burden of the nation's hatred and its woe. **Alone** he had stood for God upon Mount Carmel. **Alone** he had fled to the desert in anguish and despair. These men, chosen above every angel around the throne, had come to commune with Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering, and to comfort Him with the assurance of the sympathy of heaven. The hope of the world, the salvation of every human being, was the burden of their interview."[1]

In what way does it speak to your situation?

[1]Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, Nampa, ID: Pacific,1898, 422, 425.

7. Why were Moses and Elijah the best help at this time? What was their experience with loneliness? Moses was alone in the wilderness, possibly lonely for his own people, and Elijah was alone praying to die because he felt that no one else was committed to God.

8. Why did God sent (a) Moses to deliver Israel (Ex 3:7-10), (b) Elijah to anoint Hazael, Jehu and Elisha (1 Kings 19:14-16)? In ministering to others your own loneliness can be alleviated.

9. Your loneliness may come from a feeling that no one understands your situation. Identify someone in your community who might be in a similar situation. What steps can you take to have meaningful relationships?

---

10. Plan to get in touch with a member of this group this week to spend a short time together.

11. Many people find that going out of doors for a while can lift their spirits up. Physical activity also helps. How much time do you spend outside? Find a healthy balance between physical activity and rest.

3. What are some things you can do to deal with loneliness?

First recognize that it is a natural response to grief.

Recognize that it can afford us time to reflect on life.

Realize that it is temporary, if you are willing to confront it.

Discover new interests and hobbies, particularly those that will benefit others.

Reach out to others, to talk, to spend some time. - remember that many of your

friends still love you; they may just not know how to relate. Open the door by initiating contact.

> "If we surrender our lives to His service, we can never be placed in a position for which God has not made provision. Whatever may be our situation, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexities, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or **loneliness,** we have a sympathizing Friend."[1]

Assignment: During the next week try to do one of the following suggested activities. You can share your experience with others next week.

1. Contact a friend or a relative whom you have not had a meaningful contact with lately and spend time together.
2. Identify an enjoyable activity or hobby that you have planned to do in your spare time but have not deferred. Take steps to make this a reality.

Preview: Next week we will discuss some of the barriers to grieving. We will consider what other people have done to make sure that they do not shelve their grief before they have worked through it.

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons,* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 173.

INTENTIONAL GRIEVING

Goal: To encourage participants to identify and express grief emotions.

Review: Last week we discussed the problem of loneliness. We saw that Jesus experienced loneliness, and that Moses and Elijah were appropriate companions for Him since they too had experienced loneliness.

Today we will discuss some factors that inhibit us from working through our grief.

1. Grief is a natural result of loss. The magnitude of loss is the measure of the depth of grief.

2. Denying grief or trying to resist does not take it away. (An analogy: A balloon that is repeatedly inflated without allowing some air to escape will blow up. We need regulated releases from the tensions of grief emotions to prevent a blowout.)

3. What are some of the emotions that you felt following your loss?

   Shock, sadness, loneliness, anxiety, depressed, anger, fear, helpless, etc

4. Was it easy to express them? _____ Why? Expectations of others, being strong for the children, 1 Thess 4:13, etc.

   Are these reasons legitimate? _____ Why? _____

---

4. Some Considerations

   a. Everyone knows that the bereaved grieve, so why try to hide it to your

detriment.

c. We must be authentic humans to children if we are to be credible. Why pretend?

c. What are we teaching our children if we pretend not to grieve in the face of loss?

d. Paul would have grieved if Epaphroditus had died (Phil 2:25-27).

e. Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:33, 35).

f. How did Jacob mourn for his son? Read Gen 37:34 and write down what you find. He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned many days. (Expressing grief is not a denial of faith.)

5. Our society is changing and no longer allows us to grieve for long as in the past.

a. The extended family is now shrinking and no longer lives in one village

b. Funerals are now hurried and we are forced to be alone.

c. Grief rituals are diminishing in number.

d. Employers expect us to quickly return to the usual routine.

6. Some have found value in intentional grieving.[1]

a. Select a time and place to grieve daily.

b. Have items that help you focus on an aspect or event in the life of your loved one (picture, letter, etc)

c. write down some highlights of that event, good and not-so-good. Be honest, you do not have to share this with anyone.

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[1]Larry Yeagley, *Grief Recovery,* Self Published, 1998, 61-63.

d. Say goodbye to that aspect of your relationship with the deceased.

e. Connecting with others.[1]

7. Read 1 Thess 4:18. Our greatest source of comfort is people, not things or programs.

8. List friends, in and out of this group, to network with, after this program.

Assignment: Take time to do the suggested exercise below.

An Exercise in Reminiscing

1. Look through your pictures or items that you associate with the deceased. What memories come to mind?

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2. Choose one or two of those items to bring to the next session to show other group members and share with them the significance of those things. (During the debriefing one of the things to discuss is how the exercise of looking throw the items impacted them. Where there any feelings that they had not felt before?)

Preview: Next week we will discuss feelings of guilt and regrets. We will discover that regrets are common in grief situations. We will discuss the legitimacy of these feelings and ways to cope.

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[1]Melissa Sexson Hanson, *I Can't Find a Heartbeat* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 100-104.

GUILT AND REGRETS

Goal: To enable participants to put guilt feelings into perspective and find ways to cope.

Review: Last week we looked at some barriers to grieving and ways we can go past them. What was your experience with the assignment? Share any pain and/or benefits that it brought to you.

Today we want to look at the problem of regrets and guilt feelings. We will begin by looking at an example from the Bible.

Read the story of Joseph being sold to the Ishmaelites (Gen 37:13-36).

1. What did Reuben mean when he said "The lad is gone; and I, where shall I go?" in verse 30?_____

Had Reuben harmed the boy? _____ Explain your answer _____

_____

2. Had Reuben done all he could have done for the boy?_____ If not, what more could he have done? (Could have been more firm with his brothers not to harm the boy? Could have used his position as first born to thwart the plot.)

3. Read Gen 42:21, 22 to see the first expression of regret among the brothers. Do you think this was the first time they regretted their actions?_____ Can you imagine how they felt when they saw their father's grief?

4. Why was this regret justified. _____

5. Who do you think Jacob blamed for Joseph being "torn to pieces by wild beasts"?

_____

(Consider the fact that Benjamin did not go on the first journey to Egypt, and the father was reluctant to let him go on the second one. Why?)

6. Do you think that Jacob was justified in holding himself responsible?

_____

_____

(As you critique Jacob remember that none of us has the ability to predict the future or to know with certainty the motives and intentions of others.)

7. Looking back on your loss, are there things that you wish you had done differently? _____

(As you think about that remember that often in times of grief we are harder on ourselves than we should be. Particularly in our role as parents, we wish to be omnipotent and omniscient for them and when we fail we experience guilt feeling, especially if the outcome turns out to be tragic. Take time to think through the all the factors that were at play when you made decisions or took certain actions. Make sure you also focus on the positive contributions you made. Chances are that you made the best decisions and took the best action that was reasonably expected.)

8. Some regrets are tied to our past relationship with the deceased. (No relationship is perfect, some more so than others. We can learn from past mistakes and undertake to improve current relationships without allowing past shortcomings to

sap all our energy to have a meaningful life. We need to put our past relationships and actions into proper perspective.)

9. How can we deal with the sense of relief after someone has died, perhaps after a long, difficult illness? A sense of relief is not a sign that you did not love the deceased. Do not minimize the fact that you grieved as you anticipated the loss and that even as you have a sense of relief you are still grieving.

10. Children have guilt feelings over wishing a sibling dead. (Talk to your child about the real cause of death and that their thoughts and wishes have no power to harm anyone. Help them to see the good they have done for the deceased and others.)[1]

11. What if there are some genuine wrongs I have done?

    a. We need to acknowledge them and make amends where possible.

    b. God cleanses us from all our guilt. Jer 33:8, John 3:17.

    c. Satan is the accuser of the brethren Rev 12:10.

Preview: Next week we will discuss feelings of anger during bereavement.

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[1]This exercise will not only help children who may be burdened with guilt, but will also reinforce to the adults doing this, to focus on the fact that regrets and guilt may be irrational.

DEALING WITH ANGER

Goal: To teach participants the normalcy of anger and encourage its appropriate expression.

Review: Last week we saw that regrets and feelings of guilt are common in grief. We also noticed that sometimes we feel guilty when we have a sense of relief after someone dies. We discussed that we should put all those feelings into perspective.

Today our discussion will be about anger. Guilt and anger are related feelings; one blames self while the other blames someone else for a given situation.

1. Read 2 Sam 1:1-15. Why did David command the young man to be slain?

Perhaps his anger was just a grief reaction, or he may have been motivated by a desire for justice. While we may not know exactly the root of David's anger, his actions suggest that he was angry.

2. Was David justified in his actions? _____ Explain your answer.

_____

_____

3. What are some of the common emotions associated with grief?

Sadness, loneliness, frustration, **anger**, anxiety, etc.

4. Please share with the group a time in your grief when you were angry. Who was to

blame for your anger? Where there any innocent bystanders who got involved? (This exercise is voluntary. If you do not wish to speak about it consider recounting it in writing in your own time at home. The facilitator may share a personal experience or one he or she witnessed without revealing details.)

5. Why do grieving people experience anger? Feeling that the situation was preventable, feeling that others do not care, many emotions at once can confuse issues, the responsibilities leading to the funeral are taxing at an emotional time.

6. Is there a difference between anger as a feeling and anger as behavior? _____ Which one do you have control over? Feelings of anger are natural responses to real or perceived provocation. It is not easy to control these feelings, though we can hide them or even deny them. It is better to acknowledge feelings of anger but by God's grace choose not to let anger control our actions to others.

7. Often anger is directed to

   a. those who obviously caused or contributed to the death,

   b. those perceived to have caused death by negligence/failure to do something,

   c. family/acquaintances who fail to carry their load of responsibility after death has occurred,

   d. the deceased for living dangerously,

   e. self for perceived neglect or causing the death. (This is associated with guilt feelings).

8. Is it a sin to feel angry? _____ Explain your answer. _____

a. Read Eph 4:26. What do you understand it to mean?

b. What types of sin can anger lead to? Resentment, violence, verbal abuse.

(We all need to find sober moments when we can reflect on our anger and assess whether it is valid or not).

9. Read the passage below.

> "When you feel an angry spirit arising, take firm hold of Jesus Christ by faith. Utter no word. Danger lies in the utterance of a single word when you are angry, for a volley of passionate utterances will follow. . . . The man who gives way to folly in speaking passionate words, bears false witness; for he is never just. He exaggerates every defect he thinks he sees; he is too blind and unreasonable to be convinced of his madness. He transgresses the commandments of God, and his imagination is perverted by the inspiration of Satan. He knows not what he is doing. Blind and deaf, he permits Satan to take the helm and guide him wherever he pleases. The door is then thrown open to malice, to envy, and to evil surmisings, and the poor victim is borne helplessly on.[1]

Though it does not speak about anger in a grief context, what can we learn from it?

10. What are some appropriate ways to deal with anger?

Talking about it with the offender or with another individual (in an appropriate time and manner), Physical activity, seeking arbitration, seeking justice from authorities.

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1961), 235.

11. How does Matt 5:38-48 apply to my situation? Share with the group if you feel comfortable. (If you choose not to share with the group, consider writing your thoughts about this in your own time.)

Assignment: Please do the assignment that is suggested below. Remember you do not have to share your answers (especially the ones about your own experience) with anyone unless you choose to do so.

Assignment

1. Read Job 23.
2. What do Job's words reveal about the feelings that he experienced?

_____

3. Were these feelings justified? _____
4. What arguments do you imagine Job would fill his mouth with (v. 4)?

_____

5. In your grief experience, at what times did you experience similar feelings?

_____

6. Is there anything in Job's words that shows faith in God?

_____

7. How will you incorporate this (your answer to the previous question) into your own grief experience?

_____

Preview: Next week we will discuss how we can rekindle hope after a grief

experience. We can have hope again, in this life and we can hope for a brighter future that God has planned for us.

LIFE WITHOUT END

Goal: To share the blessed hope with the bereaved

Review: Our discussion last week was about feelings of anger. Our assignment was about Job. As you read Job 23 did you see anything that may have suggested some feelings he had? Was there anything that revealed his faith?

Our discussion this week is about hope.

A. Death strikes at hope.

1. Death as we know it seems irreversible.
2. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Eccl: 9:10 NIV).
3. Our present grief prevents us from seeing beyond the grave.
4. The two grieving disciples going to Emmaus expressed their disappointment, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel". Beside grieving the loss of a loved one, we often also grieve the death of a dream or hope. What are some hopes that ended with the death of your loved one? _____
5. How can a grieving person renew his or her hope?

a. Participation in a mission in which the deceased was involved.

b. Renew your focus on the future.

c. Ministering to others reduces a sense of helplessness.

B. God gives us a reason to have hope beyond the grave.

1. "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Co 15:19).

2. ". . . awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)." According to this verse the blessed hope is the second coming of Jesus.

3. Why is the second coming called the blessed hope (1 Thess 4: 16-18)? At the second coming of Jesus our loved ones will be resurrected and reunited with us.

4. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a *living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pe 1:3)." This verse tells me that the basis for our hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Jesus rose from the grave he gave hope a new life. How can hope be alive for me today? Focus on the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the saved.

5. The resurrection is certain (John 5:28, 29; 1 Thess 4:13-18).

C. The destruction of death

1. "Death where is your sting? Grave where is your victory" (1 Co 15:54, 55).

2. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Co 15:26)

3. Death thrown into the "lake of fire" (Rev 20:14.

D. Life without end

1. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their children with them (Is 65:22).

- In this life people often labor and then die at the point when they are ready to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

2. Our unrealized dreams will be fulfilled. Life in Heaven will be real, not a shadowy existence

> There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul.[1]

3. Dreams that were not realized in this life will be realized to a much higher level than we ever imagined.

4. Immortality restored – 1 Co 15:51 - 55.

5. God will wipe away *every* tear from our eyes – Rev 21:4. God does not only wipe away tears (a symptom of pain) but he removes also the cause of

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[1]Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home,* 549.

the tears (death and pain).

6. Nature will be harmonious again. "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD (Isa 65:25)."

Assignment: For further reading at home: Read Chapter 7 in the book *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White* entitled "A Vision of The New Earth."

Preview: Next week we will consider the importance of our involvement in ministering to others in pain.

THE TAJ MAHAL[1]

Goal: To inspire participants to reinvest their lives in appropriate ministry to others.

Review: Our discussion last week was on hope. We saw that the death of a loved one often robs us of hope. However, hope can be rekindled by refocusing on the future, participation in meaningful activities and reestablishing meaningful relationships. We also concentrated on the bright future that God has prepared for us.

Today is the last day of our support group sessions. We would like to focus on reinvesting our lives in ministry to others.

In 1631 the Mogul Emperor Shah Jahan lost his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal who died in childbirth. The two had been married since 1612 and had been inseparable companions. The Emperor chose to immortalize his favorite wife by commissioning the building of an elegant structure that would also house the tomb of the empress.

In 1632 the construction commenced, employing the services of more than twenty thousand workers from India, Persia, the Ottoman Empire and Europe. Construction work continued for the next twenty-two years at a cost of between four and five million rupees. The complex occupied forty-two acres, with the majestic central dome reaching a height of two hundred forty feet, at the top of its tip. Four smaller domes surround the main dome. The acoustics in the main dome are such that one note on a flute reverberates five times. It is one of the most beautiful structures of the world. Because of its architectural

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[1]The source for this information on the Taj Mahal is *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, London, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2002, on Taj Mahal.

design and its sheer beauty, the Taj Mahal is one of the wonders of the world.

The emperor turned his loss to something significant that has continued to charm millions. This desire to memorialize our deceased loved ones is innate in most of us. The vast majority of us, however, cannot build a Taj Mahal as a memorial for them. The good news is that it does not take the building of a Taj Mahal to satisfy that desire. With our limited resources we can accomplish something that may even have greater consequences for eternity than the Taj Mahal did. We can invest in people, rather than marble.

The emotions of grief and the tensions we experience in the aftermath of bereavement can be channeled toward helping others. Some thinking people around the world have started causes that have blessed others as a way to immortalize their loved one. They have blessed the world by helping to fund education, research on various diseases, or they have helped to fight some destructive practices. The emotional energy from their loss is thus utilized for something positive, with far reaching results in many case.

You may not have much money, power or influence, but you can build a "Taj Mahal." Your Taj Mahal does not have to be in the architectural realm, but it can be just as real and have equally far reaching results. Our grief can be the springboard from which we will launch a ministry to touch the lives of others.

Your Taj Mahal

1. Read Gen 35:18-20. Why did Jacob set up a pillar?

   It was his way to memorialize his late wife.

2. Read 2 Cor 1:1-4. Write down what it says to you

I should replicate the comfort that I received from God through the ministry of other believers.

3. Read Pro 11:25. What does it mean to you?

We receive a blessing in blessing others.

4. Ellen White wrote:

> "One of the divine plans for growth is impartation. The Christian is to gain strength by strengthening others. "He that watereth shall be watered also himself." This is not merely a promise; it is a divine law, a law by which God designs that the streams of benevolence, like the waters of the great deep, shall be kept in constant circulation, continually flowing back to their source. In the fulfilling of this law is the secret of spiritual growth."[1]

4. In the space below write down one (or more) way(s) that you can bless others?

_____

_____

5. What are your talents/resources that would be helpful in doing this?

_____

_____

6. What are your challenges?

_____

_____

7. List any individuals or organizations that could be useful allies as you think about this. _____

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[1]Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1973), 383.

8. One of the predicaments we face, particularly when we are grieving, is knowing the appropriate thing to do but lacking the will or motivation to do it. We may not feel like, reaching out to minister to others, but it is one way that God uses to lift us out of despair and feelings of helplessness. Our feelings usually follow where the will leads.

Save Myself by Saving Others [1]

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. 1 Tim. 4:16

> I have read of a man who, journeying on a winter's day through deep drifts of snow, became benumbed by the cold, which was almost imperceptibly freezing his vital powers. He was nearly chilled to death, and was about to give up the struggle for life, when he heard the moans of a fellow traveler who was also perishing with cold. His sympathy was aroused, and he determined to rescue him. He chafed the ice-cold limbs of the unfortunate man, and after considerable effort raised him to his feet. As the sufferer could not stand, he bore him in sympathizing arms through the very drifts he had thought he could never get through alone.
>
> When he had carried his fellow traveler to a place of safety, the truth flashed home to him that in saving his neighbor he had also saved himself. His earnest efforts to help another had quickened the blood that was freezing in his own veins and sent a healthy warmth to the extremities of his body.
>
> The lesson that in helping others we ourselves receive help must be urged upon young believers continually, by precept and example, that in their Christian experience they may gain the best results. Let the desponding ones, those disposed to think that the way to eternal life is trying and difficult, go to work to help others. Such efforts, united with prayer for divine light, will cause their own hearts to throb with the quickening influence of the grace of God, their own affections to glow with more divine fervor. Their whole Christian life will be more of a reality, more earnest, more prayerful . . . The testimonies borne by them in the Sabbath services will be filled with power . . .

---

[1]Ellen G. *White, My Life Today* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1952), 234.

APPENDIX C

REGISTRATION AND EVALUATION FORMS

REGISTRATION FORM

NAME _____

ADDRESS

_____

_____

_____

PHONE _____

YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE DECEASED _____

DATE OF YOUR LOSS _____

WRITE IN THE SPACE BELOW ANY TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE FIVE WEEK PROGRAM.

1_____

2_____

3_____

TRAINING PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM

1. What aspects of the training program helped you most to prepare you to lead support groups? _____

2. What aspects were least helpful?_____

3. The level of discussion was too complex ____ too simple ____ just right ____.

4. What other aspects would you want to see incorporated into this training program? _____

5. Did the class exercises help to prepare you to run grief support groups?

   Very helpful ____ Somewhat helpful _____ Not helpful _____

6. I feel prepared to go and lead a grief support group. Strongly agree _____

   Somewhat agree _____ Strongly disagree _____

7. Please share any comments on how you think this training program can be improved_____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

SUPPORT GROUP EVALUATION FORM

1. What aspects of the support group met your need?

_____

2. What aspects were least helpful?

_____

3. Time spent in the group sessions was too long ____ too short ____ just right ___.

4. What other aspects would you have wanted to see incorporated into grief support group?_____

5. Did you feel that the facilitators were prepared for the group sessions? Well prepared ____ Somewhat prepared _____ Not so well prepared _____.

6. The facilitators gave participants opportunity to speak freely. Strongly agree _____ Somewhat agree _____ Strongly disagree _____

7. The venue was convenient for the group meetings. Yes ____ No ____ Please make suggestions in the space provided. _____

8. The meeting times were convenient. Yes ____ No ____ Please make a suggestion

_____

9. In the space below please share any comments on how you think this program can be improved. _____

_____

APPENDIX D

PRINTOUT OF SOME ONLINE DOCUMENTS

Current Folder: **INBOX** **Sign Out**

Compose Addresses Folders Options Search Help Calendar SquirrelMail

Message List | Delete Previous | Next Forward | Forward as Attachment | Reply | Reply All

Subject: Re: EZC Update March 25 2005

From: "Douglas Mutanga" <dougmutanga@yahoo.com>

Date: Mon, March 28, 2005 11:41 am

To: simba@andrews.edu

Priority: Normal

Options: View Full Header | View Printable Version

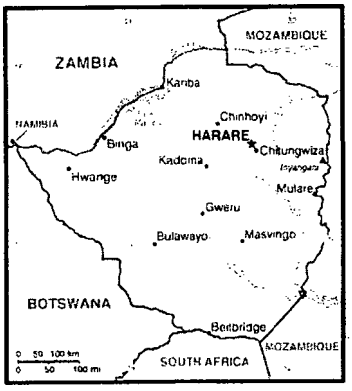
Thanks for keeping in touch.
The Official membership of the union is 471 649 as of December 31, 2004. Increase for this quarter may not exceed 20000 which you may add to the official figure. The estimate number of pastors is 165 for the whole Union as each Conference has an average of fifty pastors in the districts/churches. We do not have HIV and AIDS statistics for the members only, but I am of the opinion that our statistics in church may be thirty percent lower than the country statistics as there are factors that contribute to this. Many women are married to non-Adventists. The Church targets the infected for evangelism. Our prevention drive among youths in our schools and churches is yielding results. You may verify the following statistics with WHO statistics about Zimbabwe-
1600 000 adults are affected.
24.6 is the prevalence rate.
930 000 women are infected
120 000 Children are infected
170 000 deaths of Adults and children annually
980 000 orphans are currently left behind

I hope this will help. Greetings. May God Bless You

Your Truly

D. Mutanga.

Zimbabwe



The Present Context

One of the world's highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection, compounded by political and economic crisis have made Zimbabwe, one of the poorest countries in Africa, ranked 91st out of 95 on the UNDP Human Poverty Index scale. Zimbabwe's GDP has contracted by 40% since 1999. The structural unemployment rate is more than 60%.

The economic collapse has severely impacted the livelihood of the population. Food insecurity is severe and diffuse: due to limited food availability and affordability, 5 million people—out of the total population of 11.6 million—are unable to meet their minimum food requirements and are at risk of starvation.

The delivery of social services and social safety nets has suffered from the attrition of civil servants and the contraction of public spending. Community's and households' coping mechanisms are continually eroded by the devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic that is an overriding humanitarian concern. Death and sickness are crippling the society and undermining medium and long-term prospects.

Crisis involving: Part of the Population

Millennium Development Goals in Zimbabwe

Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger	Achieve universal primary education	Promote gender equality	Reduce child mortality	Improve maternal health	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria etc.	Ensure environmental sustainability	Global partnership for development
Far behind	...	On track/ Far behind	Slipping back	...	...	On track	...

From UNDP, Human Development Report, 2002

Main Public Health Issues and Concerns

Health Status

- An estimated 2,600 adults and 690 children died each week in 2003 as a result of AIDS, and there are some 800,000 AIDS orphans in the country. Recent estimates indicate that about 25% of Zimbabwe's sexually active population is infected with HIV. Zimbabwe is on the list of countries for treatment scale-up of the WHO 3 by 5 Initiative.
- Increased community and institutional vulnerabilities are highlighted by the occurrence of cholera epidemics in areas previously non-affected.
- In February 2003, the National Nutrition and EPI Coverage Survey indicated that levels malnutrition were still below the recognized emergency thresholds. National averages, however, mask significant variations at the district level, where Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) range from 2.8 to 10.7%. In some areas severe acute malnutrition reaches alarming levels in relation to GAM.

Health System

- The health care delivery system, once considered as a model for the region, has collapsed due to under-funding, lack of foreign exchange for importing drugs, and attrition of qualified staff, leading to a reduced management and delivery capacity (see table below).

Staff Category	Establishment	Staff in-post	Vacant	Vacancy rate (%)	Population/ Category ratio
Medical Doctors	1,530	687	843	55.1	16,885
Dentists	59	16	43	72.9	725,000
Nurses	11,640	6,940	4,700	40.4	1,671
Pharmacists	132	12	120	90.9	996,667
Environmental health officers	1,624	764	860	53.0	15,183

- The deterioration of the health care system has led to 75% self-referred patients at central hospitals. At the primary level, utilization of services has declined, due to a lack of essential drug supplies, staff shortages, low quality of services, poor maintenance of health facilities, and an inability of patients to pay user fees for care.

Main Sector Priorities

While the substantial investment for the recovery of the sector will have to wait for political solutions that improve relations between the Government and donors, the challenge for the sector is to address the main causes of morbidity and mortality with the limited resources available. The most urgent priorities include:

- Improved health service delivery capacity to prevent and control disease outbreaks associated with the crisis—particularly cholera and malaria;
- Immunization promotion, therapeutic feeding and emergency related reproductive health issues;
- Scaled-up interventions aimed at the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS.

Other priorities:

- Prevention of loss of life and human suffering through food aid, nutrition, critical health and education interventions, and protection initiatives;
- Strengthened household livelihoods, with improved food security, minimum standards in essential services, and supported recovery efforts addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS;
- Strengthened coordination and effectiveness of humanitarian actions to develop a concerted response to the recovery needs of the country by advancing an effective and structured dialogue among humanitarian stakeholders.

NCCE official warns against expensive funerals

Akropong (Brong Ahafo) 18 March

The Nkoranza District Education Directorate of the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) has launched a programme to educate the people on the need to guard against expensive funerals.

Mr Yaw-Effah Manu, district education officer of the NCCE, warned that frivolous expenditure on funerals only result in wastage.

He called on the people to invest in the education of their children, adding "it is unfortunate that some people prefer to spend their money on frivolous ventures rather than educating their children'.

Mr Manu urged parents to show greater responsibility for their children, warning that the large number of teenage mothers in the district is neither in the interest of neither the district nor the nation at large.

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